

MyKey"

Radar-

Sound Screen™ Acoustic Laminated Glass' and 10 other new sound management technolog

EASY FUEL capless fuel filler

Lumbar-Massaging Multicontour Heated And Cooled front seats with Active Motion **

SYNC HANDS-FREE COMMUNICATIONS with traff



'Available features.' EPA-estimated 18 city/28 hwy mpg, FWD. 'Optional. Real-time traffic monitoring available in select markets. Some features are unavailable while driving. Service available in the 48 contiguous states and Washington, DC. SIRIUS Travel Link is a trademark of SIRIUS XM Radio, Inc. '1 Optional. Driving while distracted can result in loss of vehicle control. Only use mobile phones and other devices, even with voice commands, when it is safe to do so. SYNC Traffic, Directions and Information not available on vehicles with optional Navigation System with SIRIUS Travel Link. 'Class is five-passenger large cars equipped with standard and optional driver-centric features.

28 MPG"

390-Watt, 12-speaker SONY® AUDIO SYSTEM®

nabled Blind Spot Information System (BLIS*) with Cross-Traffic Alert

New SR1 rear suspension

8" Navigation System with integrated SIRIUS TRAVEL LINK™ gas prices, movie listings and times, and weather

All-Wheel Drive

c, directions and information"

Intelligent Access with PUSH-BUTTON START

YOU SAY OBSESSIVE LIKE IT'S A BAD THING.

Actually, obsessive behavior led us to some very good things. Like radar technology that monitors and alerts you when the sensors detect vehicles in front of you, behind you and in your blind spots.* And hands-free, voice-activated SYNC®* that gives traffic reports, directions and can actually read your text messages out loud. We speak car. We speak the all-new Ford Taurus. The most innovative car in America.*

INTRODUCING THE ALL-NEW
TAURUS



Drive one.

fordvehicles.com

Contents

AUGUST 17, 2009



ON THE COVER: COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

A golden year for golden arms

Texas' Colt McCoy is one of three marquee quarterbacks who told SN why they passed on the NFL for another year in college. "At the end of this season, we want there to be no debate about how good we are," he says of the Longhorns. Plus, check out our preseason rankings and previews of every BCS conference.

SEE A DIFFERENT GAME

- In Pictures
- 6 Since You Asked ...
- 8 My Profile Carlos Pena
- Survey Says ... 24 former New York Giants talk about their old team
- 11 5 Questions for Mike Singletary

- 12 Next Gen
- Will's World with Will Leitch
- My Idol Justin Morneau
- **Sports Biz** 15

FEATURES

Take 'All Day' on draft day

SN's fantasy football experts rank the top 200 players, and a few NFL veterans lend their advice as well: "You don't want to draft Beanie Wells with the Cardinals when you know they're gonna throw the ball 100 times a game," Maurice Jones-Drew says.

SN Conversation: Drew Brees

The Saints' Pro Bowl quarterback has had no trouble piling up gaudy numbers, but a championship still eludes him: "We have a stretch here, a small window. This is our time, and we need to make sure we make the most of it." -By Steve Greenberg

All show, all go

Cocky, young, brash, gifted: Kyle Busch is the driver NASCAR fans love to hate. "They don't care to know the good side of me," Busch says. "They've already got a mindset. It is what it is. It doesn't bother me." -By Matt Crossman

PHOTOS

Champing at the bit

SN saw everything there was to see during a week of behind-thescenes access at Pittsburgh Steelers training camp. Linebacker James Harrison was in such a hurry to begin defense of his team's Super Bowl title that he arrived in the first vehicle he could find-a tiny Smart Car. It wasn't long before teammates started teasing him and he had to save face, saying: "I'm holding it for a friend."

THE ROTATION

hungry as ever.

We spent the first week

Steelers. Hines Ward and his

teammates showed up as

of training camp with the defending champion

- NHL
- 71 Baseball
- 78 NFL
- **NBA**
- College basketball
- NASCAR
- I Remember ... **Boog Powell**

Even the mighty Yankees have a stretch-drive question: Will Phil Hughes wilt under pressure?

SPECIAL GUESTS

- 59 Billy Miller
- Todd Jones
- 73 Harold Reynolds
- Dale Murphy
- Joe Flacco
- Juan Pablo Montoya
- 88 John Feinstein

MULTIMEDIA

Are you ready for some football? We've got 28 packed pages of picks, pans and players to watch in our annual NFL preview, coming in the next issue. Find out whom Troy Aikman is high on, why we like the Giants to win it all and much more.

Preseason SN All-Americans Eric Berry of Tennessee and Ndamukong Suh of Nebraska headline our 18-man roster of player columnists this fall. Read their weekly diaries starting August 24 in the world's first digital daily sports newspaper.

Catch interviews with some of sports' biggest names every weekday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. ET on The Tim Brando Show. Tune in on 185 affiliates, on Sirius Satellite Radio Channel 127 or online at radio.sportingnews.com.

Sign up today for Fantasy Source Edge, our daily fantasy baseball newsletter. You'll get updates on top performers, injuries, lineup changes and key splits delivered to your inbox every morning.

Customer service and to subscribe: 800-777-6785. Subscription questions or problems: subscription@sportingnews.com. Delivery questions or problems: delivery@sportingnews.com.

Micromanage your Fantasy team right up to the toss. With NFL Mobile Live

you can add, drop, bench, start and second-guess, all from your Sprint phone. You'll also be able to track your team's Fantasy points, get real-time player stats, news, rankings and exclusive analysis.

Only from Sprint. Only on the Now Network.

Text NFL to 7777 or go to sprint.com/NFL

Standard text/data rates apply.











Since You Asked

You have guestions, we have answers

YOUR OUESTION

Lately, the ACC has become known for putting out a lot of high NFL draft picks. You had Chris Long and Matt Ryan last year. And this year, Maryland wideout Darrius Heyward-Bey was one of four top 10 picks from the league. So, who's next?

- Bill Wilcox, Raleigh, N.C.

THEIR ANSWER

Darrius Heyward-Bey No. 7 pick in the 2009 NFL draft

Bill,

I was going to say Russell Wilson, the quarterback from N.C. State, but I don't know how he'll fit into a pro-style offense. I'll go with (Clemson running back) C.J. Spiller. He'll definitely be a top 15 pick. He's so fast, he hits the hole hard, and he can outrun anybody sideline to sideline. The way the NFL's going now, with so many tworunning back systems, he can definitely complement someone.



YOUR OUESTION

I know he's not doing any funny business because he still weighs less than I do. So how does my favorite Tiger, Curtis Granderson, explain his home run binge this season? - Ray Sauro, Detroit

THEIR ANSWER

Curtis Granderson Tigers All-Star center fielder

Ray,

I keep getting asked this question, and I honestly don't know. My weight is the same as it has been the past three seasons, give or take 3 to 5 pounds depending on the time of season. My bats are the same ones that I've been using for the past three seasons, both in length and weight. My stance has changed a little bit but nothing major. So I really have no clue why the numbers have gone up.

YOUR QUESTION

I'm not expecting a Super Bowl, but how much better could the Chiefs be this year after upgrading at quarterback? Should I be more optimistic than I've been lately? - Jim Franklin, Kansas City

THEIR ANSWER

Priest Holmes Chiefs career rushing leader

Jim,

Kansas City upgrading its roster with the likes of Matt Cassel reminds me of the adage "The things of old are now made new." The Cassel trade, along with new G.M. Scott Pioli and new coach Todd Haley, is going to enhance the mindset of the team. All three have one thing in common: They're coming off winning and successful seasons, comparatively speaking. When a team has winners, the psychology shifts, and that energy becomes contagious. The formula the Chiefs are experimenting with is one to feel optimistic about.

YOUR OUESTION

It's like Jeopardy! All letters to the editor must be phrased in the form of a question, even if it's "You guys really think Sam Bradford could be the best Oklahoma player ever?" We'll choose our favorites and answer them in this space and regularly in Sporting News Today. E-mail your

questions to yourturn@sportingnews.com, along with your name and hometown.

Am I loony for thinking the Vikings may very well be better off with Sage Rosenfels at quarterback than they would have been with Brett Favre?

- Frank Allen, St. Paul, Minn.

THEIR ANSWER

Ron Jaworski Former Pro Bowl QB

Frank,

The Vikings would have been much better off with Favre. He was playing very well with the Jets last season until he suffered the arm injury. Having Brett's aggressive approach to the game would have upgraded the entire offense. The receivers would have benefited, the O-line would have been better because Favre gets rid of the ball, and Adrian Peterson would have had a field day running against a normal box rather than a loaded box. Sorry, Frank, but Favre would have helped.

YOUR OUESTION

What's next for Romeo Crennel? At 62, is he done with coaching, or does he want another crack at it? — Hal Hightower, Cleveland

THEIR ANSWER

Romeo Crennel Former Browns coach

Hal,

My hip surgery and recovery went well. I am four months into my rehabilitation and am pain-free. I want to be in football in some capacity next vear. I will investigate football opportunities after this coming season. In the meantime, spending time with my grandchildren has been great.



YOUR OUESTION

Mets G.M. Omar Minaya can't seem to do anything right these days but got a four-year extension last fall. Are the Mets the kind of team where money would matter, or would they just eat the contract if they wanted to go in another direction?

- Dan Freeman, Hartford, Conn.

THEIR ANSWER:

Steve Phillips

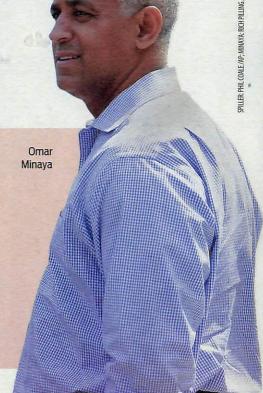
Former Mets G.M., ESPN analyst

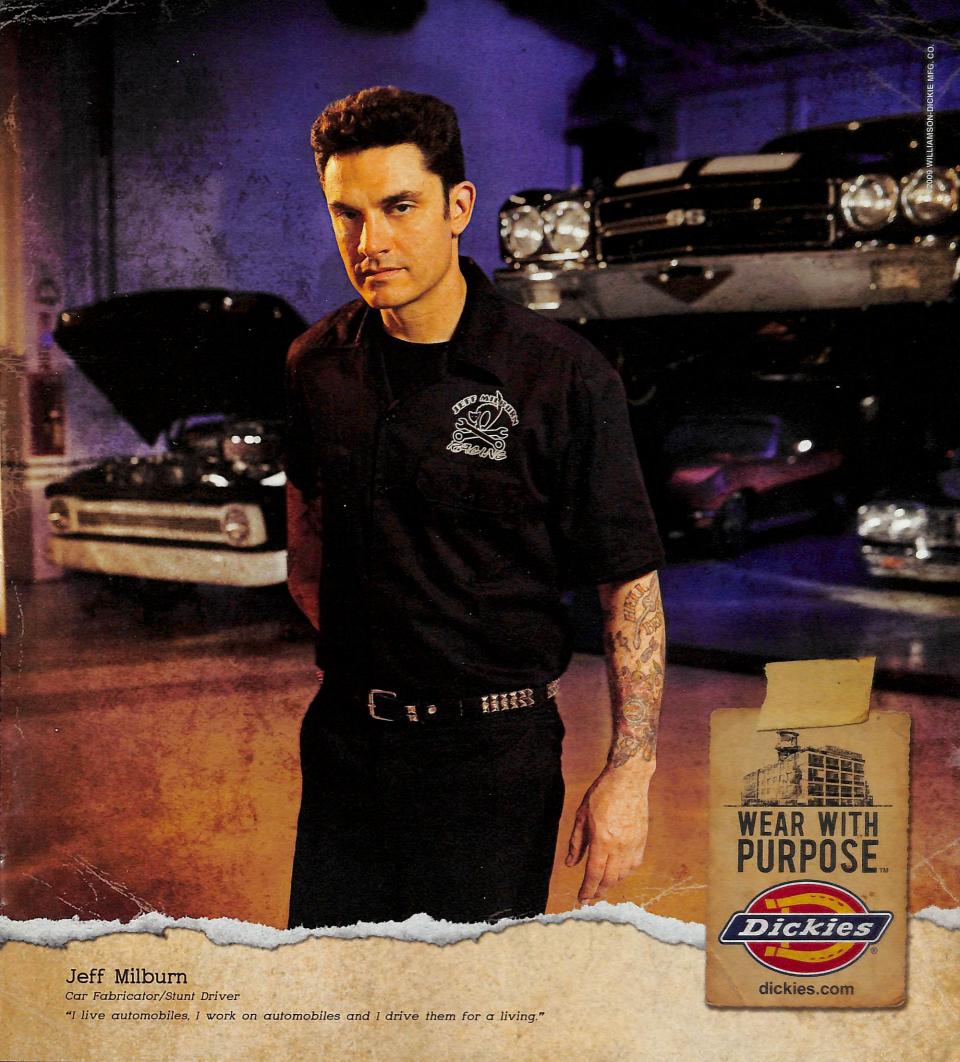
Dan,

The Mets have the money and resources to make a change if they deem it appropriate, but I have no expectation they are

going to let him go-nor should they. Sure, the Mets' season has been a disaster on the field. But if you were to take the Nos. 1, 3 and 4 hitters-plus a No. 2 starting pitcher and eighth-inning setup man-out of any team, it would lose. No general manager has the ability to create enough depth to

overcome the injuries the Mets have faced. There have certainly been a number of off-field distractions, but none is worth terminating Minaya's contract over. He is a good person and a good evaluator of talent. It's just been a bad year all around for











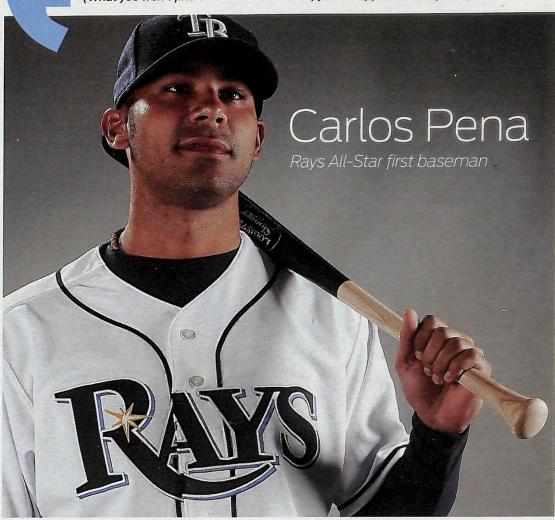
GET THE COORS LIGHT POLE POSITION ALERTS ON YOUR PHONE.

STANDARD TEXT MESSAGE RATES APPLY. OTHER CHARGES APPLY. Must be 21 years or older to participate. Void where prohibited. For help, text HELP. To stop, text STOP. Program ends 11/23/09. Visit www.coorsms.com for official terms & conditions. NASCAR® is a registered trademark of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, Inc. ©2009 COORS BREWING COMPANY, GOLDEN, CO *BEER

SEE A DIFFERENT GAME

My Profile

(What you won't find on Facebook ... even if you are approved as a friend)



- **▶ Born:** May 17, 1978, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
- > Status: Married
- > Alma mater: Northeastern
- > What's on TV: CSI Miami, Prison Break, History Channel's Engineering an Empire and Decoding the Past, Discovery Channel's Planet Earth
- > What's in my iPod: Juan Luis Guerra, Eddie Herrera, Wisin & Yandel, Marc Anthony, Gilberto Santa Rosa, Juanes, Gipsy Kings
- > What I drive: 2008 lava rock Audi Q7, 2008 black Infiniti Q56
- > What I'm reading: The Alchemist, by Paulo Coelho
- ➤ Favorite flicks: Gladiator, The Rock, The Edge, John Q, The Dark Knight, The Count of Monte Cristo
- **▶ Magazine subscriptions:** Robb Report, International Homes
- **> Worst habit:** I misplace everything—keys, cell phone, bats, glove, you name it.
- **On my office walls:** Pictures of my wife and daughter and of my favorite players, including my teammates; pictures of the beautiful beaches of Punta Cana in the D.R. I can transport myself momentarily just by looking at them.
- ➤ Love to trade places for a day with ... Tiger Woods. Going to the World Series and winning the

- American League championship in 2008 was an absolute blast. I know that Tiger puts in a lot of work, but winning over and over again ... now that must be a whole lot of FUN!
- > First job: Henderson's Farm, Haverhill, Mass. Age: 15. Position: Official squash, pumpkin and zucchini collector. I got paid minimum wage, which was around \$5.25 an hour, to take care of the crops and then collect them, as I like to call it. Besides the arduous work, I really enjoyed my co-workers and got a killer farmer's tan.
- > Talent I'd most like to have: I love cooking. If only I could actually do it.
- ➤ Favorite meal: My wife cooks this delicious rice with beans and barbecue pork chops, then adds sliced tomatoes and fried sweet plantains. OMG! Dominican-style!
- > Favorite city to visit: Chicago
- > Favorite value in others: A joyful outlook on life
- **> My greatest love:** (Wife) Pamela and (daughter) Isabella
- > My heroes: Mom and Dad
- > My bucket list: Travel the whole world, and then revisit my favorite places often. And then do it again.
- > My motto: I gotta believe it to see it.

- Jeff D'Alessio



Survey Says ...

- ▶ Better coach: Tuna or Tom Coughlin?
- > Plaxico Burress: Finished or future star?

Sporting News surveyed 24 former New York Giants for answers to those questions and others

SN's panel

Billy Ard G, 1981-88

Mark Bavaro TE, 1985-90

Brad Benson OL, 1978-87

Harry Carson LB, 1976-88

Howard Cross TE, 1989-2001

Dave Gallagher DL, 1975-76

Chris Godfrey G, 1984-87

Jack Gregory DE, 1972-78

Ali Haii-Sheikh K, 1983-85

Wendell Harris LS, 1966-67

Don Herrmann WR, 1969-74

Jerry Hillebrand LB, 1963-66

Pat Hughes LB, 1970-76

Gary Jeter DL, 1977-82

Ernie Kov RB/WR/P, 1965-70

Bob Lurtsema DL, 1967-71

Leonard Marshall DL, 1983-92

John Mendenhall DT, 1972-79

Roman Oben OT, 1996-99

Gary Reasons LB, 1984-91

Jimmy Robinson WR, 1976-79

Joe Taffoni OT. 1972-73

Aaron Thomas TE. 1962-70

Butch Woolfolk RB, 1982-84

If we picked the Giants to win it all in our next issue, think we'd look smart come February?

>> Yes	18
≫ No	5
➤ If they get a receiver	1

THEY SAID IT

"Very smart." - Harry Carson

"The Giants are one player away from returning to the Super Bowl. They need a go-to wideout." - Leonard Marshall

"They are going to miss Plaxico."

- Gary Jeter

"If the Giants stay healthy, you could look like geniuses." - Mark Bavaro

"Unless the Giants make a trade for Anguan Boldin or Braylon Edwards, they won't win the division. I think they're a 10-6 team at best, and hopefully they play their best four weeks of football after Christmas." - Roman Oben

"I think the Eagles just might win the NFC East." - Bob Lurtsema

Have we seen Eli Manning's best?

≫ No	23
➤ Yes	1

Jack Gregory

"I watched him through college, and in my opinion, he has more talent than his brother."



Eli Manning

"I don't think we've seen anything yet. All the Giants fans are waiting for him."

- John Mendenhall

"He will become even better as he becomes the dominant personality on the team."

- Howard Cross

"He is learning more each year. I just wish he could change some of his facial expressions."

- Joe Taffoni

For whom would you rather play: **Bill Parcells or Tom Coughlin?**

➤ Parcells	15
➤ Coughlin	7
➤ Neither	2

THEY SAID IT

"Bill is all that and a bag of chips."

- Leonard Marshall

"Coughlin had his finest moment when he changed his approach to fit today's players' needs. With Parcells, you get his way or the highway." - Roman Oben

"Parcells is of the same mold as my coach at Michigan, Bo Schembechler. He demands much and his criticism would be harsh, but he's someone I'd love to go to war with."

- Dave Gallagher

"The new Tom Coughlin is my type of coach, but I'm still very partial to Bill." — Billy Ard "I could not play for Bill Parcells."

- Jack Gregory

Who's the best player on the 2009 Giants?

➤ Eli Manning	8
➤ Justin Tuck	6
➤ Brandon Jacobs	41/2

Also receiving votes: Kevin Boss, Chris Snee, Osi Umenyiora, offensive line as a whole, defensive line as a whole.

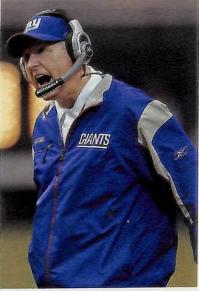
THEY SAID IT

"I'd love to have had Osi Umenyiora and Justin Tuck in front of me." - Gary Reasons

"The running backs set the tone for every game. No one wants to tackle a runaway 260-pounder like Brandon Jacobs." - Butch Woolfolk

"The whole offensive line has never gotten the credit they deserve."

- Joe Taffoni





Coughlin (top) won votes when he changed his approach to coaching, but in Giants history. Parcells is still king.

Think Plaxico Burress will ever be a major factor in the NFL again?

≫ No	13
➤ Yes	7
> Unsure	3
➤ Hope so	1

THEY SAID IT

"If he is, let's hope he invests in a holster."

- Mark Bayaro

"Yes-unfortunately." - Don Herrmann

"Plaxico gives all us players a bad name. He isn't done being stupid and has no remorse."

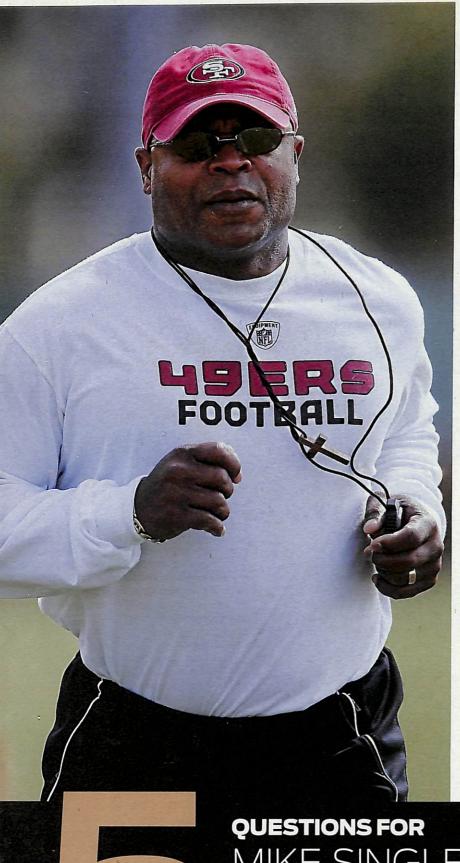
- Brad Benson

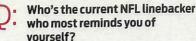
"First things first: He needs to get some professional help-and then worry about playing football." - Leonard Marshall

"I wouldn't want him on my team. He and Michael Vick do not belong in the NFL. It's not a right but a privilege." - Bob Lurtsema

"That's up to Plaxico. He needs a major attitude adjustment." - Aaron Thomas

- Jeff D'Alessio





Terry Barnes, Naperville, Ill. Singletary: From an intensity standpoint, I'd have to say Ray (Lewis)even though he talks a whole lot more than I ever did. He goes out there and he leads the football team. That's the thing that I really prided myself on-not just playing the game but also making a difference in the level of the guys around me. But to be honest, when I look at the players today, the game has changed so much-you can't hit with the helmet, you can't be as violent as the time I played. That eliminates guys. You might have some guys who could be violent, but they're afraid of the NFL taking away their paychecks every week.

How much Mike Ditka is there in vour coaching style?

Fred Ouigley, Shreveport, La. Singletary: A little bit more than I'd like. Coach Ditka and I used to talk a lot, and he'd say, "You're a lot like me." At the time. I couldn't see it. But sometimes, when practice is over and I've said a few things, I think back to that. Goach Ditka was great for me, and I'm sure there's a part of me that was in him. I just make sure I curb it on the side a little bit because sometimes Coach could take it to the next level. Hopefully, I don't get that good at it.

I lived in Chicago during your run there, and I thought your chief asset was your single-minded drive to get the job done. Now, it's your job to manage men who may not have that same work ethic. How difficult was the realization that not everyone approaches the game with the same passion as you?

Tom Olson, Stamford, Conn. Singletary: That was something I used to talk to (then-Bears defensive coordinator) Buddy Ryan about. I would get very frustrated sometimes as a player that some of the guys wouldn't put their time in. He would just tell me that everyone has their own gifts and because I studied a certain way or for

a certain length of time did not make somebody else wrong because they didn't do it the same way. I'm a little bit different in terms of how I approach the game. I understand that and don't expect everybody else to do it. But there is a certain level that's very basic that I expect them to get to.

There was talk (in 2002 and '07) of your being a candidate for the head coach job at your alma mater, Baylor. There's an embarrassingly small number of African American head coaches at the Division I-A level. Do black coaches get a fair shake?

Alan Williams, Lakeland, Fla. Singletary: Universities are really put in a tough spot. College football is different than the NFL. In college, you have so many people involved in the selection process, so many different agendas. To some people, they don't care if they win a game. Others on the publicity and sales side, they want to win. So to me, they kind of end up settling or finding common ground-someone they feel they can identify with, someone who they feel they can communicate with. If my perception is "I don't really understand the African American as well, and I don't feel as comfortable with the African American" ... a lot of times the African American gets eliminated because of stereotypes. It's a very tough situation, and I don't think it's going to be settled anytime soon.

When 49ers tight end Vernon Davis played for Maryland, he once scored three touchdowns in a game. With another year comes more anticipated maturity from him. Do you envision throwing the ball to him more this season, especially in the red zone?

Chris Kennedy, Baltimore Singletary: I get very excited about Vernon, from any point on the fieldcoming out, plus territory, four-down territory, red zone. Wherever it is, Vernon's going to be a threat. His maturity has just gone to another level. I'm really looking forward to the season he's gonna have.

- Jeff D'Alessio

MIKE SINGLET

Mike Singletary was one of the roughest, toughest, meanest, hardesthitting linebackers the NFL has ever known. Now, if he can just get a little of that to rub off on the 49ers. After taking over the once-proud franchise on an interim basis seven games into last season, the Hall of Fame Bears legend enters his first full season as boss. Before leaving for training camp, Singletary, 50, answered questions from Sporting News readers.



Looking ahead to 2010

More than a month removed from the 2009 NBA draft, it's time to catch up with scouts and personnel men about which players they're keeping an eye on for 2010

PG JOHN WALL, Fr., Kentucky. He's strong, fast and athletic-plus he is 6-4. His jumper needs work, which is why one scout calls Wall "a bigger, stronger Rajon Rondo."

PFED DAVIS, Soph., North 2. Carolina. He is a big, quick athletic lefty. Davis needs to add strength and variety to his game, but he's a nearly surefire top five pick.

CCOLE ALDRICH, Jr., Kansas. Aldrich is diverse offensively and may be the most NBA-ready of next year's prospects. "He is fundamentally sound," says one personnel exec. "He needs body work, but he could play in the NBA now and he would not embarrass himself."

PF DERRICK FAVORS, Fr., Georgia Tech. He is a tremendous leaper for a 6-9 player, which makes him an ideal shot blocker and a good big man to have running on the fast break.

SG EVAN TURNER, Jr., Ohio State. He is a 6-7, do-everything shooting guard who can rebound, handle and pass the ball and take over the lead scoring role if he needs to.

SFAL-FAROUQ AMINU, Soph., Wake Forest. He is very athletic and has a 7-foot wingspan. Because of Turner's athleticism and his ability to rebound, he draws comparisons to Shawn Marion.

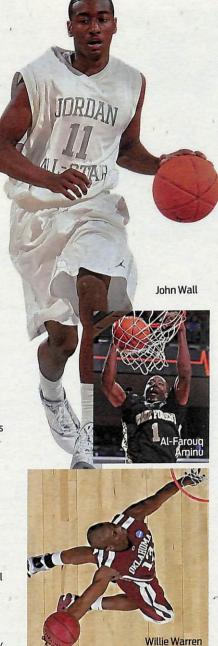
7. Oklahoma. He wants to show what he can do without Blake Griffin. The main thing Warren must do to boost his NBA stock is show he can play point guard.

CGREG MONROE, Soph., Georgetown. He reminds some scouts of Brad Miller because his strength is his highpost passing. If Monroe shows an improved low-post game, he will be a top 10 pick.

PF PATRICK PATTERSON, 9. Jr., Kentucky. He is 6-9 and undersized for an NBA power forward. But Patterson is as strong and efficient a post player as there is in this draft.

CSOLOMON ALABI, Soph., Florida State. He is limited offensively but is 7-1 and has great potential as a shot blocker. "He's raw, and you never know how much work guys will put in," says one scout. "But he is big and he can guard the rim. Someone will take a shot on him."

- Sean Deveney



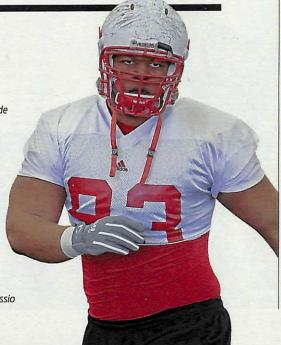
NFL DRAFT

Getting to know ... Ndamukong Suh, Nebraska defensive tackle

- > In the Ngema tribe in Cameroon, my first name means ... House of Spears.
- > The classes I'm taking this semester are ... Productivity and Human Factors in Construction, Construction Cost Controls, Mechanical/Electrical Project Management, Architecture Structures II, Engineering Economy I.
- > I came back for another year to ... Finish my degree and to learn more football under this coaching staff.
- > The most annoying thing in the world is ... Fake people.
- > I'd pay a lot of money to spend a day with ... Gabrielle Union.

- > The best movie ever made is ... Inside
- > The philosophy I live by is ... Work hard, play hard.
- > My most impressive feat in the weight room was ... 34 continuous body weight dips or 19 continuous pull-ups.
- > The most extravagant possession Iown is ... My car, a Land Rover.
- The last time I amazed myself on the field was ... During the Gator Bowl, Coach Carl Pelini told me to go make a play-and I went out and got a sack.

- Jeff D'Alessio



NHL DRAFT

Who's No. 1?

John Tavares was pegged as the first pick in the 2009 NHL draft two years before it took place. The 2010 draft? It's not so clear. E.J. McGuire, director of NHL Central Scouting, breaks down the top North American candidates to go No. 1:



THE EARLY LEADER

> Taylor Hall, LW, Windsor Spitfires (OHL). "He was only the most valuable player at the (Canadian Hockey League's) Memorial Cup. ... In 20 games (of the OHL playoffs), he had 16 goals. He scored almost a goal a game and more than a point per game. He's just a brilliant skater, and the numbers prove that he can produce points and goals."

OTHER CONTENDERS

> John McFarland, C, Sudbury Wolves (OHL). He's smallish, but he's growing, He had almost a point per game as an underager (in the OHL), and he played really well. He grabbed everyone's eye when he was second in scoring on the Canada team in the under-18 junior championships this spring."

> Erik Gudbranson, D, Kingston Frontenacs (OHL). "He's 6-31/2 but still skinny at 184 pounds. He's due to develop in the mold of a tall, skinny defenseman. He looks skinny, but so did Chris Pronger. He's a guy who moves well for his size; he's not clumsy at all. He has yet to break out offensively, but that may come with more ice time and more prominence next year on that Kingston team."

> Cam Fowler, D, Windsor Spitfires (OHL). "He's a big, solid defenseman who played well on the under-18 (U.S.) team. He's played against older players and he will next year in the OHL. He handled all opponents last year quite well. He's physical, uses his size and has mobility and speed with his skating."

- Craig Custance

Will's World

A job in sports? Sign me up

Working for a professional team doesn't seem so far-fetched anymore



Will Leitch is the author of three books, including God Save The Fan. He is the founding editor of Deadspin and a contributing editor at New York magazine. Get more of his opinions at leitch.tumblr.com.

Last issue, I asked you to come up with the sports you'd most want to play professionally. As I probably should have suspected, baseball and golf were the overwhelming winners. The reasons are obvious: Neither sport requires much running, and neither involves huge people punching you or tackling you. Makes sense. This is Sporting News, not Runner's World.

The notion of that column was simple and fanciful: Obviously, you and I would never actually work in the world of sports. You have a real job; I type quickly enough to make people think I do. I pretty much assumed the St. Louis Cardinals wouldn't keep my resume on file.

But last month, Mets general manager Omar Minaya called out New York Daily News reporter Adam Rubin for writing negative stories about the Mets after having asked about a job with the team. Note: I know Rubin and think he's an outstanding reporter, and Minaya later had to apologize. (Twice.) But I don't really care about that. I had no idea you could just ask for a job with a team. I assumed that door was closed to the rest of us and had been for some time.

As a youth league baseball player, around 12 or 13, I was an above-average defensive catcher but too small to bat higher than eighth in the order, and my arm was too weak to throw out any baserunner who didn't fall down. If I had the potential to make it to the big leagues, I'd



Even though he's only a bullpen catcher, Murphy gets to dress like a real Cardinal.

certainly need to already be the best player in Mattoon, Ill., and I was a far cry from that. This seemed obvious to me, and I was surprised it didn't seem obvious to my dad.

"Dad, let's face it," I said, trying to sound knowing and world-wise, the way adults talked when they were in the other room drinking margaritas while we kids were playing Nintendo and pretending we couldn't hear them. "I'm never going to be a major leaguer. It's just not realistic."

My father, then just 37, a little older than I am now, looked a little tired, slower, a little vacant when I said that. Now that I think about it, it seems like we played a lot less catch after that, a lot less than we used to.

They say all sportswriters secretly want to be athletes, and having played in media softball leagues in New York, I can confirm this to be true. But I know I'm never going to play baseball professionally. I've accepted that. (Finally.) But you can just go up ask teams for jobs? Baseball teams are hiring? Sweet! John Mozeliak, general manager of the Cardinals, consider this my open application letter. I won't even pull an Adam Rubin and write terrible things about your team. That's an awful job interview.

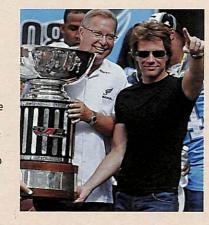
I even know what job I want: Jeff Murphy's job. Jeff Murphy is the bullpen catcher for the Cardinals. Last week, a reader named Matt, responding to the sports job question, summed up why bullpen catcher is the best job in sports: "I would get to visit various different professional ballparks in various cities, I would get to see baseball games live almost every day during the baseball season, I would get to hang out with real stars, and I would get to wear a team uniform. I would never be at fault for any of my team's failures but would be able to celebrate when the team accomplishes something. I could never work out, party every night, show up to work hung over every day, and nobody would really care, nor would my actions really affect my team's success or failures."

Sounds good to me! Mr. Mozeliak, have your people call my people.

People of the Fortnight

Jon Bon Jovi. Sad: An Arena Football League owner leaked word (over Facebook!) that the league likely would be folding. I loved Arena Football and not just because it made best friends of Ron Jaworski and Bon Jovi. (I cannot fathom what those two men talk about.) Amusingly, af2, the spinoff league, is still going. They can

just knock off the 2, right?



Tiger Woods. I would like to reach the point in my life that multibillion dollar corporations like CBS and the PGA Tour send out press releases making it clear that I did not, in fact, pass gas on air during the Buick Open. Ever hear someone accused of thinking their "(expletive) don't stink?" Tiger Woods has grown men clamoring to prove it.

Bold, daring predictions

You will spend most of August flabbergasted that, somehow, it became August. This is the shortest summer in recorded history: I fully expect it to snow next week.



Somewhere in America, aprobably Florida, someone will see a Corn Flake shaped like Tim Tebow's head and sell it on eBay. It will fetch at least \$45.

Lenjoy attending baseball games in person far more than NFL games because I am always afraid someone at an NFL game will kill me. I'm going to put aside my fears, though, and go to a game this year, and I want you to come with me. Tell me why your NFL experience is the best at will@deadspin.com, and the best sales job wins the "prize" of attending a game with me this season. Sell me!

My Idol



BY JUSTIN MORNEAU TWINS 1B

Growing up in British Columbia, I couldn't settle on one favorite player. I had three, all with a local connection of sorts. JOHN OLERUD played for my favorite team, the Toronto Blue Jays. KEN GRIFFEY JR. played for the closest thing I could call my hometown team, the Seattle Mariners. LARRY WALKER was the best player from Canada. All three were great lefty hitters. Also being a lefthanded hitter, I could not be bothered with righthanders.

As a kid, I always said hockey was my favorite sport in hockey season and baseball was my favorite in baseball season. We started baseball in March after hockey ended and played 'til September,

when hockey started. When I wasn't playing baseball in the summer, I was watching. Almost

all of the Blue Jays games were on TV then, and the Mariners still were on free TV. Because of the time difference, on the same night, sometimes I would watch the Blue Jays first and then the Mariners. We didn't get a lot of Expos games, but when they came on I was watching.

We usually went to the Kingdome a couple of times a season, trying to time it when the Mariners were playing the Blue Jays. That way, I was able to watch Griffey and Olerud.

My dad owned a sporting goods store that sold cards, so my brother and I built up a pretty good collection. Most of them are hockey cards, but I have kept plenty of baseball cards, too, especially Olerud, Griffey and Walker cards. We still have boxes and boxes at home.

I don't ask guys to sign stuff, but I did ask John for a bat. That's one of my favorite things. I keep it right beside my Walker bat. (I) have become pretty good friends (with Olerud and Walker) over the years. I still haven't managed to ask Griffey for a bat yet, but I'll try sometime when we play Seattle.

- As told to Stan McNeal

Sporting News

SINCE 1886 Incorporating TSN

Ray Shaw (1989-2009) CHAIRMAN

Whitney Shaw PRESIDENT

Ed Baker **PUBLISHER**

Kirk Shaw **EXECUTIVE VP & CFO** SR. VP, CIRCULATION Rob Fisher Jeff D'Alessio **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

EXECUTIVE VP, PRESIDENT, RADIO Clancy Woods Stuart Marvin **VP. INTEGRATED MARKETING & SALES**

CHARLOTTE OFFICE: 704-973-1550, 1-800-443-1886

MAGAZINE EDITORIAL

MANAGING EDITORS: Dan Graf, Benson Taylor CHIEF OF CORRESPONDENTS: Bob Hille

ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITORS: Corrie Anderson Gifford, Barry Reeves SENIOR EDITORS: Chris Bahr, Ken Bradley, Jim Gilstrap, Bill Marx,

Carl Moritz, Derek Samson, Ron Smith

STAFF WRITERS: Albert Breer, Clifton Brown, Matt Crossman, Dave Curtis, Craig Custance, Mike DeCourcy, Sean Deveney, Dennis Dillon, Bill Eichenberger, Ryan Fagan, Steve Greenberg, Matt Hayes, Vinnie Iyer, Brian McLaughlin, Stan McNeal

SPORTINGNEWS.COM EDITORIAL

MANAGING EDITOR: Marcus DiNitto

SENIOR EDITORS: Tom Gatto, Chris Littmann, Justin McGuire, Kathy Sheldon George Winkley

ASSOCIATE EDITORS: Bill Bender, Daniel Blank, Paul Day, Alisha Hord, Matt Lutovsky, Brad Pinkerton, Jim Ryan, Ray Slover

SPORTING NEWS TODAY EDITORIAL

MANAGING EDITOR: Paul Kasko

NIGHT EDITOR: Vincent Lara-Cinisomo

ASSOCIATE EDITORS: Jason Boyd, Sean Gentille, Roger Kuznia

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Keith Wood **ART DIRECTOR:** Lara Moss

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS: Jaclyn Barrientes, Lisa Pazdric,

Catrina Wojciechowski

PHOTO

CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER: Albert Dickson SENIOR PHOTO EDITOR: Paul Nisely ASSISTANT PHOTO EDITOR: Jeffrey Furticella STAFF PHOTOGRAPHERS: Jay Drowns, Bob Leverone

SPORTINGNEWS.COM

DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL MEDIA: Geoff Shaw

DIRECTOR OF ONLINE ADVERTISING OPERATIONS: Beth Hinson

DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY: Dan Koch

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT:

Shawn Schrager

SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATORS: Mike McDonough

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Ke Xu Q/A ANALYST: Daniel Barker

ANALYTICS MANAGER: Patrick Pleiss ACCOUNT MANAGER: Porschea Bethea

SENIOR PROGRAMMERS: John Branca, Patrick Daly

PROGRAMMERS: Chris Gomez, Hillisha Haygood, Mark Rosenthal-Ayres

SPORTINGNEWS.COM CUSTOMER SERVICE

MANAGER: Eric Ferreira

ASSOCIATES: David Arnott, Jacob Desvaux, Benjamin Valentine FANTASY GAMES/ONLINE CUSTOMER SERVICE: 704-973-1553

PRODUCTION

PREPRESS DIRECTOR: Bob Paraion

INFORMATION SYSTEMS DIRECTOR: Keith Camden

DIRECTOR OF DISTRIBUTION AND POSTAL AFFAIRS: Steve Guthrie ADVERTISING PRODUCTION MANAGER: Dee Dee Douglas

PREPRESS SPECIALISTS: Jack Kruvne, Steve Romer

ADMINISTRATION

BUSINESS MANAGER: Linda Smith

CONSUMER MARKETING

DATABASE MARKETING MANAGER: Joe Figiel

RETAIL SALES AND MARKETING

GENERAL MANAGER: Jim Penegar

DIRECTOR: Michael Garavalia

SALES DEVELOPMENT/MARKETING

VP/DIRECTOR: Eric Karp

MARKETING MANAGERS: Pam Dresher, Anne Keegan, Seth Lasker

EVENTS MANAGER: Laura Dantzler

DIRECTOR: Neil Napolitano

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES

VP, ADVERTISING DIRECTOR: Paul Severini,

pseverini@sportingnews.com, 212-500-0680 ACCOUNT MANAGERS: Michael Dupree, mdupree@sportingnews.com, 212-500-0659 Jeff Rich, jrich@sportingnews.com, 212-500-0671

Suzanne Tyrie, styrie@sportingnews.com,

MIDWEST MANAGER: Jon Nelson, CHICAGO

jnelson@sportingnews.com, 312-893-4072 DETROIT ACCOUNT MANAGER: Jeff Budnick,

jbudnick@sportingnews.com, 313-640-4540

LOS ANGELES VP, WESTERN REGION: Jim Souders,

jsouders@sportingnews.com, 310-399-8754 ATLANTA

ACCOUNT MANAGER: Scott Flaxman.

sflaxman@sportingnews.com, 770-414-9810

DIGITAL ADVERTISING SALES

NATIONAL SALES MANAGERS:

Joey Glowacki, jglowacki@sportingnews.com, 704-973-1856 Gary Strauss, gstrauss@sportingnews.com, 212-500-0672

SR. VP. SALES AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT:

Shawn Pastor, spastor@sportingnews.com, 301-738-0311

VP, SALES:

Lee Rosenthal, Irosenthal@sportingnews.com, 602-635-4173

VP, SALES AND MARKETING:

Paul Talbot, ptalbot@sportingnews.com, 602-635-4172

EDITORIAL OFFICES

120 West Morehead Street, Charlotte, NC 28202 704-973-1550, 1-800-443-1886

Letters to the editor: vourturn@sportingnews.com Contact the editor: idalessio@sportingnews.com

REPORT

The New York Mets and the Puerto Rico Tourism Co. have unveiled a new partnership, and officials for the tourism agency say they are close to a companion deal with first baseman Carlos Delgado in which the Puerto Rico native would help promote travel to the island.

The Orlando Magic and Amway Global have signed a 10-year, \$40 million naming rights deal for the team's new arena. The \$480 million facility will be called Amway Center and is scheduled to open in October 2010. Amway Global also owns the naming rights to the team's current home, Amway Arena.

The Miami Dolphins have

signed a deal with Cisco Sports & Entertainment to install Stadium/Vision technology at Land Shark Stadium. The company already has deals for its Internet Protocol Television system with the Dallas Cowboys and New York Yankees.

● EA Sports has abandoned the public, on-site event marketing approach for the launch of this year's version of Madden NFL, opting instead for a strategy that leans heavily on national cable TV and massmarket retail. The game's release is scheduled for August 14.

To sign up for the best sports business coverage anywhere, go to sportsbusinessjournal.com.



THE OWNER'S BOX

Peter Karmanos, Carolina Hurricanes



- Fans don't know how much I ... Hate both Florida teams.
- The hardest thing about being a leader is ... The feeling of never doing good enough.
- ➤ I'm frugal in that ... I squeeze the last drop of toothpaste out of the tube before I open a new tube.
- The last luxury I indulged in was ... A 2009 Hummer H2.
- > I'm up and at 'em by ... 6 a.m.
- > I can't live without ... My newspapers in the morning with coffee.
- > Every morning, I read ... The Detroit News, Detroit Free Press, The New York Times, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal and, when available, The News & Observer (Raleigh, N.C.)
- > My one unbreakable rule is ... Never make unbreakable rules.
- > My business role model outside of sports is ... Mitt Romney.
- My philosophy on meetings is ... Short and sweet.
- The worst job I ever had was ... Clerk at Detroit traffic court. I was bored silly.
- If I were king for a day ... There'd be a shorter hockey season.
- The next big thing in sports is ... Hopefully, back to basics in all sports. No ESPN hype.

- Jeff D'Alessio

gosunoco.com

OUR DEGAL, YOU WIN FIRESPOT OUR DEGAL, YOU WIN FIRESPOT



Get your decal at Sunoco, get spotted, and win instantly. 15,000 instant prizes plus one 5,000 gallon grand prize!

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. A PURCHASE WILL NOT INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING, LEGAL RESIDENTS OF THE 50 UNITED STATES (INCL. D.C.), 18 AND OLDER. VOID IN MD, NJ, VA AND WHERE PROHIBITED. Ends: 8/31/09. For Official Rules, instructions to obtain a Decal. prize descriptions and odds disclosure, visit www.gosunoco.com/freefuel5000 or a participating Sunoco Retailer. Sponsor: Sunoco, Inc. (R&M), 1735 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103. NASCAR. Inc. is not a Sponsor of the Sweepstakes. NASCAR is a registered trademark of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, Inc. © 2009 Sunoco, Inc. (R&M). All rights reserved.

he best coach of.
quarterbacks in the nation
has a theory when it comes
to the most important position on
the field. It's one of those lucid,
thought-provoking statements
we've come to expect from Mike
Leach, the game's free thinker.

Embrace what is instead of what could be.

How's that for earth-shattering?
"There are quarterbacks in the
college game now that are just doing
remarkable things," says Leach,
whose quarterbacks at Texas Tech
are appliedly among the nation's

whose quarterbacks at Texas Tech are annually among the nation's leaders. "And all we want to talk about is how they project to the NFL."

So here's a better idea: Project how the quarterbacks in today's college game would fare against the greatest in their schools' history. The NFL and its computer formulas and system tags can wait. There has never been a more glorious time to be a quarterback in the college game.

Tim Tebow or Danny Wuerffel? Colt McCoy or Vince Young? Sam Bradford or Jason White? Jevan Snead or Eli Manning?

In the Big 12 alone, nearly half of the quarterbacks likely will finish their careers as the best in school history: Bradford, McCoy, Zac Robinson of Oklahoma State, Todd Reesing of Kansas and Robert Griffin of Baylor.

Then there's Taylor Potts, Leach's latest in a long line of guys who can sling it. At 6-5, 220, Potts is Leach's most physically gifted OB yet.

"You're gonna love this guy," Leach says. "He looks like Kenny Stabler and acts like Bart Starr."

The comparisons are out in full force all over the nation. Case Keenum is putting up Andre Ware/David Klingler-type numbers at Houston. Robinson is going to break all the records his coach, Mike Gundy, set in the 1980s. Oregon's Jeremiah Masoli could do what Dan Fouts and Joey Harrington never did: lead the Ducks to a Rose Bowl victory—and maybe win a Heisman Trophy along the way.

There are four statues outside Owen Field in Norman, Okla., one for each of the Sooners' Heisman winners before Bradford. By the time Bradford completes this season, he'll likely have done enough to be celebrated as not only the greatest Oklahoma quarterback—but the school's greatest player.

Embrace the history, everyone.

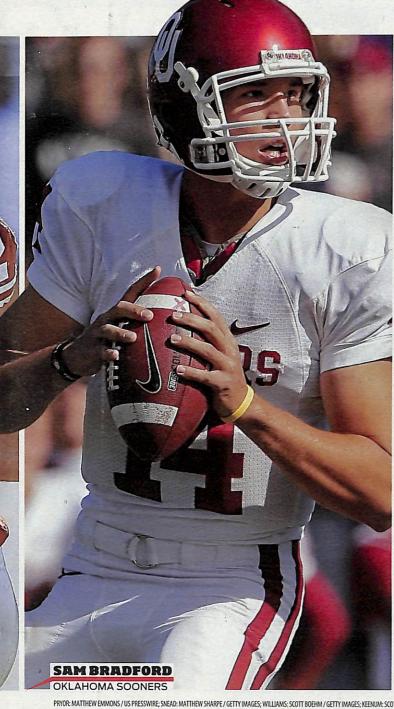
— Matt Hayes

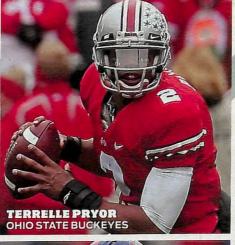
A GOLDEN ARMS

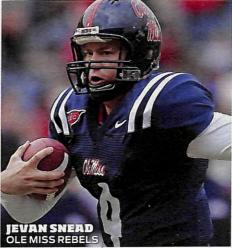


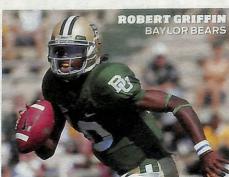
YEAR

It's more than just TEBOW, McCOY and **BRADFORD**—the game's most important position has never looked so good





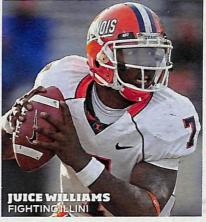




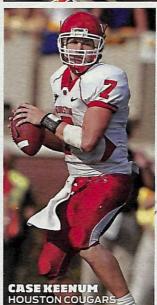
COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

YEAR OF THE OB















THE LEGENDS LIKE TEBOW

Sporting News asked members of the Legends Football Coaches Association which quarterback—Florida's Tim Tebow, Texas' Colt McCoy or Oklahoma's Sam Bradford they'd pick to start a team, and we ran into a common theme:



FISHER DEBERRY, Air Force, 1984-2006 "You couldn't go wrong with any of the three. But I'd go

with Tim Tebow because, selfishly, if I was coaching I'd be running the option and he'd be the best at that. All three have excellent leadership skills—but he's won a national championship and it's just the intangibles he brings."



VINCE DOOLEY, Georgia, 1964-88 "Tebow is the ultimate

winner. In all my time and

experience, Tebow combines more things in one package than anybody I have ever seen-athlete, competitor, character, spiritual, student, etc., etc."



FRANK KUSH, Arizona State, 1958-79 "Tim Tebow is better on the field as a general than any

quarterback running the spread offense. He can do it all—call plays, audible, run, pass. He's quick and mobile. He's always a factor in the game. He is the offense."



JOHN RALSTON. Stanford, 1963-71

"Tebow is extremely strong and will be a great pro player,

but I like the touch of Bradford. I'd pick Bradford."



R.C. SLOCUM. Texas A&M, 1989-2002 "If I had to pick one, I would

pick Tebow because he can almost single-handedly turn a game around. He might be capable of making more big plays to determine the outcome of a game than the other two."



JOHN COOPER, Ohio State, 1988-2000

"Tebow: great leader. Bradford: probably the best pure passer. Colt McCoy might be the

best all-around."

DON JAMES, Washington, 1975-92 "I'd take Tebow. There are critical times in every game

when a QB has to make a play. He'll do that."



BILL MALLORY, Indiana, 1984-96

"Tebow. He's a total player. He can run and he can throw.

He's a 'we' person. He cares about his teammates. Physical, hard-nosed. When he's gotta step up, he does it."

- Derek Samson

TWO-ON-ONE: **TIM TEBOW**



John Brantley, Florida backup quarterback

When your grandkids ask you about playing with Tim Tebow, what's the first play you'll mention to them?

The jump pass that sealed the deal against Oklahoma in the national championship game. To be able to jump and make that kind of

throw—David Nelson was covered—is such an athletic play. And one of the reasons David made that catch was because of how his game got better being around Tim. That's the effect he has.



Scot Loeffler. Florida quarterbacks

What changes will we see when Tim Tebow takes the field in September?

I don't think there are major changes. He really did a great job getting into a natural 10 o'clock release point. And he did a better job getting the ball out quickly through what he's done in the film room and then on the field. The things he's done in college football are astounding. We're not going to change a whole lot. Just try to make him a little bit better at some things.

- Dave Curtis

WHY I CAME BACK TO FLORIDA

BY TIM TEBOW

we want to leave that the the BEST TEAM in the

hen I think about the reasons I came back to Florida for my last vear, I start thinking about all the things I've been able to do that I couldn't have done if I was spending my time with the draft and the Combine and everything else. We had a Charity Week that we put on in May where we did a lot of work with kids who are underprivileged or have some health issues. It was a very rewarding experience, and it's one of my favorite things about being the quarterback at Florida.

One of the days during Charity Week, we wanted to give hope to some local kids in Gainesville. So we partnered up with Disney and spent the day with them, walking around the parks and singing Gators cheers. A lot of them had some pretty crazy stories of things they had gone through. I know some of them were dealing with tragedies involving their parents. We wanted to give them the world, but we tried to at least give them a day where they could have fun and enjoy some things they usually don't get to see.

One of the things I've realized is what a great platform I have at Florida. And giving that up to go to the NFL last year, even though that's a dream of mine, seemed too much to pass up. It seems like the whole campus here has gotten involved with trying to help other people—the fraternities, the student government, the Filipino student organization and lots of others have been very helpful with what we're trying to do.

We're over at Shands hospital a lot, visiting kids, mentoring kids, trying to keep their hopes up. We hosted three of them and their families at the Orange and Blue Game, and I found out one of the girls wanted a Taylor Swift autograph. I used some contacts to get one. The look on her face when we told her what we had done made everything so worthwhile.

The other part of this, of course, is trying to win another championship. Florida has never had an undefeated championship season, and that's a goal for us this year: to be the first team in school history to make that happen. With perfection, as an individual, it's unattainable. Perfection is the goal, but by yourself, you're not going to hit it all the time. Individuals fumble and throw incomplete passes. But as a team, you can overcome that and end up with perfection as a group. That's a big motivator for us this offseason.

Photo by Preston Mack for SN

COUNTRY

We've been close to perfect my freshman year and my junior year. One more play against Auburn in '06, and we've got it. Same with Ole Miss last year. But a lot of the games we've won, it was one play in our favor that got us the win. That's why I love that speech from Any Given Sunday about the importance of a few inches. Six inches too far or too short, that's the difference at those crucial times. We've learned that.

It's so difficult to go undefeated. Ever since I've been in college, football has gotten so much more competitive around the country. When you're playing Tennessee, LSU, Georgia, Vanderbilt, teams like that every year, you're not going to dominate the game 14 straight times. You're going to slip and fall. If you can get back up that day and still manage to win, that's the key to perfection.

We're trying to get ready for that now. Our strength coach, Mickey Marotti, has us going through workouts where we're pretty much crawling out of his room every day. The theme is discipline in everything. If you're 1 second late for a workout, you're wearing a 30-pound vest all day. And when we run in groups, everybody's got to make a certain time, not just the leaders.

We're trying to be more together. We've tried to help other people off the field as a group, and we've won championships as a group. All the way around, we want to leave no doubt that the Gators are the best team in the country.

- As told to Dave Curtis



WHY I CAME BACK TO TEXAS

BY COLT McCOY

We want there to be

about how

his spring, I had to start going to class incognito. I always try to walk in a group, and I have my hat down low and try to blend in with anybody. It's kind of a game, and over the semester it got to be pretty fun. How often can I get from the locker room to class without being stopped for a picture or autograph?

I have different guys I walk with-the Tuesday-Thursday group is different than the Monday-Wednesday group. The guys take me through the dining hall, and then they're my escorts to class. It's really fun when my offensive linemen get out there and think they're trying to get me to the end zone.

Look, it's not bad when I get stopped, and everybody on campus knows who I am. I enjoy doing that for other people, and I definitely want to be friendly and be nice. But last year, when we were right there for the Big 12 championship and I went to the Heisman presentation, it was hard to get from Point A to Point B. So the guys are helping me out this year.

There are a lot of factors that played into my decision to come back to Texas, and the fun I get to have around campus every day is right at the top of the list. I can't

wait for the opportunity to play Texas A&M and Oklahoma, and the games are so much fun with so much tradition. But campus is a pretty fun place right now, mainly because there's a lot of energy around campus about this football season.

Everybody wants to talk about it. In some respects, that's back to normal for me. But it feels a little different this year, maybe a little bit more intense than in the past. Everybody feels like we're going to be a pretty good team that can get back to where we were last year. And that's when we're going to have the real fun that comes with the decision to come back to school.

Obviously, I've had a lot of time to think about the decision, and I honestly can say I don't have any regret. I knew during the season that I wanted to come back for one more season, so it wasn't a real hard decision for me at the end of the year. One benefit has been paying more attention to some of my former teammates going through the transition to the pros.

It's a very intense process-I remember on our pro day, I got to watch all our guys under pressure and try to figure out where I would need to be good to make sure I was impressive when I go through that

next year. I think it's better that I'm watching and learning now than just diving into the NFL process after last season.

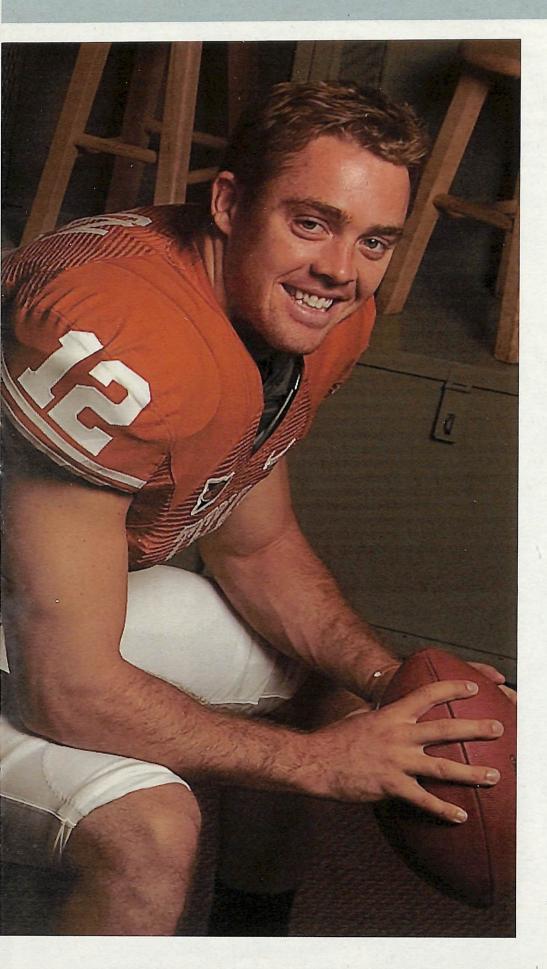
All our focus now is on the season coming up. We had a great spring, watched a bunch of film and hit the weights hard. The big thing this year is that we have so many guys who want to play, and so many guys trying to fill the open spots that we have, that for a lot of guys you couldn't take a day off or somebody would pass you. I don't know if we're going to have a better team than last year, but I know we have a lot of guys who can play at a high level. We found that out going ones vs. ones a lot in the spring, and so many of our guys hung in there. We've got a lot on offense. And the defense played really well in the spring, and the whole secondary is back.

The bottom line is, we know what it takes to go 12-1 and go to a BCS game and beat really good teams like Oklahoma and Ohio State. Now, the theme has been "Let's raise it another level." At the end of this season, we want there to be no debate about how good we are. We want to win championships. We don't want to go to the postseason incognito this time around.

- As told to Dave Curtis

Photo by Jay Drowns / SN

YEAR OF THE OB



ONE-ON-THREE: CINCINNATI'S TONY PIKE



Cincinnati's Tony Pike, SN's preseason All-Big East QB, shares what he admires most about college football's superstar quarterbacks:

ON TEBOW: "The biggest thing I see is his leadership. That's how you want to be portrayed as the leader of your team. You see him on the sideline, and he's firing up everybody. When he comes off the field, he's got the headset on, and he's working with the coaches."

ON McCOY: "He has great energy. and at the same time, you never see him get rattled. You see him throw five or six touchdowns in a game, and he's great. Then he throws an interception or two, and you never see the look on his face change. As a quarterback, you need to have a short memory and forget any hardships you have. He does a good job with that."

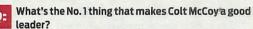
ON BRADFORD: "It's the throws he makes. With the line he had in front of him last year, he only had to buy a little bit of time, and he put the ball where it needed to be every single time. And, you hear guys talk about arm strength, but there are certain plays where you can't rifle the ball in. He makes them all. He can put zip on it and put great touch on the ball."

- Dave Curtis

TWO-ON-ONE: COLT McCOY



John Chiles, Texas wideout and former backup quarterback



The thing I'm always most impressed with is how he handles the spotlight. He handles all of the pressure and attention really well. Most importantly, he's still the same guy I first met on my recruiting trip, even though now he's one of the players everybody talks about ... a Heisman finalist, national player of the year candidate.



Greg Davis, Texas offensive coordinator

Colt says he can't imagine a player having a better relationship with a coach than what you two have. What makes that work?

It's like a marriage. At first, everything's great. Can't be any better. And all of a sudden, the tough decisions start popping up. Do we drive this car? What house do we buy? For us, it's: How do we win games and a championship? You live through that and come to have a great respect for each other. And we both have a great love for the game and studying it and trying to get

- Dave Curtis

ONE-ON-THREE: BOISE STATE'S KELLEN MOORE



Boise State's Kellen Moore, SN's preseason All-WAC QB, shares what he admires most about college football's superstar quarterbacks:

ON TEBOW: "He's tremendous. He brings a different aspect. I'm not in any way in the same mold as him, but I love watching him. He's a guy where I try to take the aspects that he shows and apply them to myself. His leadership. The way he manages the game. And he always sets up his guys in places so they can be successful."

ON McCOY: "He just gets the job done. I'm a West part of the country guy, and I'll watch Texas when they're on. Every time you watch, he's completing balls and making plays. Week in and week out, you see him playing tough and winning games."

ON BRADFORD:

"It's just a lot of consistency. That's the key part of being a successful quarterback, I like his calmness and coolness throughout the whole game. He seems even-keeled. If a bad play happens, he's ready for the next one. He has the mentality of not worrying about the past or the future."

- Dave Curtis

TWO-ON-ONE: SAM BRADFORD



Iohn Nimmo, Oklahoma backup quarterback

How much does Sam still think about his and the Sooners' performances in recent bowl games (losses to West Virginia and Florida)?

It bothers him guite a bit. The last national championship game, that really hit him hard. I could see it. He prepared himself the most I've ever seen. He understands he's the quarterback, the guy everybody looks to. The success that our offense had, being tops in the country, that's also part of it. So I think he understands that he's the one in control of all of that. It's up to him whether we rise or fall. So when we fall, it completely bothers him.

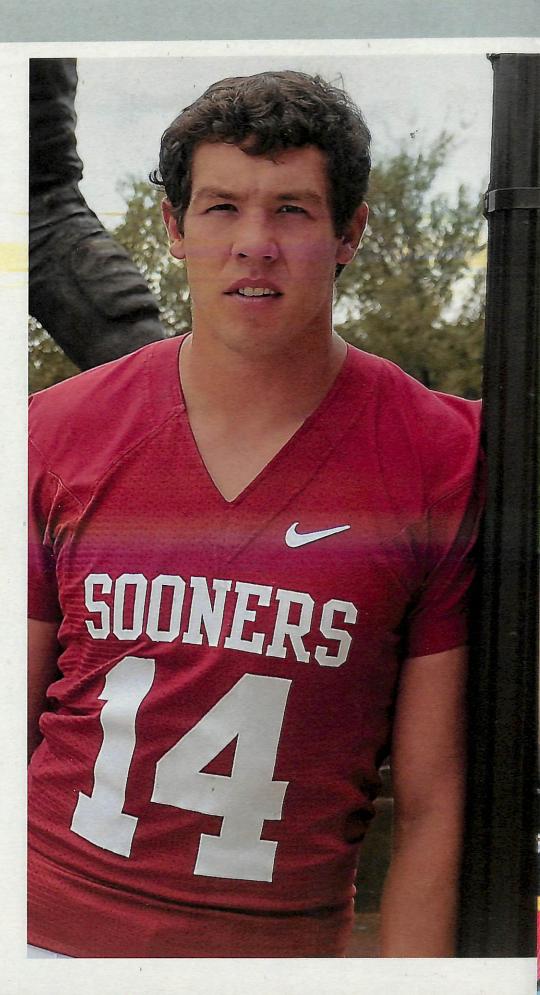


Wilson, Oklahoma offensive coordinator

What's one of Sam's assets as a quarterback that doesn't get enough attention?

Probably that he's a much better athlete than anyone gives him credit for. When Kelvin Sampson was here as basketball coach, he said, "That kid could play for us in the Big 12." If we had 100 guys out there, and we're picking for basketball, he's one of the top four kids. And you've got to see him on the golf course. He played here the other day and he made six birdies and shot 1-under. And from golf, he understands a good shot from a bad shot, when to go for the pin, when to go for the middle of the green. That helps make him a tremendous manager on the field.

- Dave Curtis



YEAR OF THE OB

WHY I CAME BACK TO OKLAHOMA BY SAM BRADFORD

'This time, we want to

econd thoughts? I haven't any, and I can honestly say that. I felt when I made my decision to come back, no matter what I decided, I was going to need to stick with that decision. Since the announcement, I haven't looked back, not one day. I'm only looking forward, trying to help the team win another Big 12 championship. And I'm on track to graduate next spring, in business, and that's something I want to have.

As far as things I've been able to do since I've been back, well, I've played a lot of golf. I might have been able to do that anyway, but I've really enjoyed playing with some of my teammates. We went out to San Diego at the end of the spring and played six rounds. One was at Torrey Pines, the South course, where Tiger won the U.S. Open in a playoff. I played not bad, not great-78, with a double bogey at 18.

The other cool thing was getting to go down to the Davey O'Brien banquet in Fort Worth. I got to talk with Joe Theismann there, which was really cool, considering he was such a great NFL player. I don't want to reveal everything we talked about, but the big thing he hit on was what it takes to be a leader and how I needed to do anything it took if we want to be more successful at Oklahoma. For him to share his wisdom with me meant a lot.

I've already talked about why I came back, but I know people are going to say, "Well, you're coming back because you guys lost to Florida." The Florida game didn't factor in at all. If you let one game totally affect your decision, your decision probably is not made on all the right factors. I didn't think about that game once when I was deciding what to do.

But now, I still think about that game from time to time. I think about all the plays that got away, some of the mistakes, and the ways we could have won that game. That game still hasn't left me. We learned that night that it all boils down to a couple of plays. It's not anything major. We just need a little better execution. It's a very thin margin between winning and losing when you have two great teams and so many great players in a game like that.

When you lose in the national championship, there are a lot of different feelings. The team accomplished a lot last year. But the biggest thing is that it is frustrating knowing how close you were to winning something that you wanted as a little kid. The only thing you want to do is get another chance at that.

So that's what we've been doing and thinking about all offseason. As a team, especially in the winter, we worked about as hard as we could. Like I said, we know what it takes to get there. This time, we want to

end the season on a good note. The offense made a lot of progress. If you saw us Day No. 1 of the spring and then you watched us Day No. 15, you wouldn't have recognized us. Our timing got better, and the new guys got in and learned the system.

Our line, especially, got a lot better, and that gives everybody a lot of confidence. We had a great line last year. A great line. All those guys are going to play in the pros. So with the new guys coming in, I just wanted to get some chemistry with them. I absolutely need to trust the line. The minute you start not trusting is the minute some of your decision-making ability goes down.

Instead of thinking of reads and the stuff you should be focused on, you're thinking of other stuff. That can get you in a lot of trouble. So we spent a lot of time learning how to play with one another, communicating better, and just trying to get it together for two-a-days.

I'm already getting asked about next year and whether I'm going to come out early. It doesn't matter much to me now, where I might get picked or what that might hold. Who knows what will happen by then? I know this time around, I could never really see myself leaving Norman. I was just checking things out, making sure it was the right decision. I don't know yet what the right decision will be after this season.

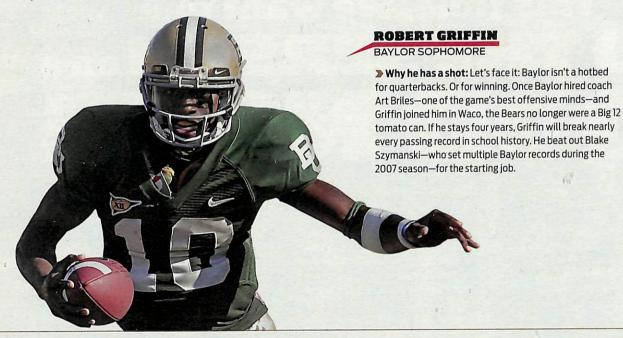
- As told to Dave Curtis

Photo by Jerry Laizure for SN

10 MORE WHO COULD RULE THEIR SCHOOL

THE TEBOW-McCOY-BRADFORD TRIO WILL DOMINATE HEADLINES THIS FALL, BUT THE LIST OF COLLEGE QUARTERBACKS SOON TO BE LEGENDARY AT THEIR SCHOOLS IS DEEP. AT LEAST 10 HAVE A CHANCE TO BE THEIR PROGRAM'S BEST OB EVER BEFORE LEAVING CAMPUS.

By Dave Curtis and Matt Hayes



- > Top competition: Don Trull, 1961-63 (Houston Post's 1963 Southwest Conference MVP); Larry Isbell, 1950-51 (All-Southwest Conference selection in 1950-51).
- > What they're saying: "There are unique players, and then there's Robert Griffin. It's remarkable how easy the game comes to him-and he's played one season. I can't wait to coach him every day because I can't wait to see what he does next." - Baylor coach Art Briles
- > Will he do it? Yes. Griffin's numbers as a freshman (2.953 total vards, 28 total TDs, three interceptions) were ridiculous, especially considering he was months removed from high school, learning a new system and playing with teammates still adjusting to a new coach. And, of course, he was playing for Baylor, Griffin not only could be the best quarterback in school history, he has the potential to become the best player in school history.

CASE KEENUM HOUSTON JUNIOR



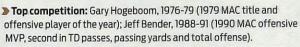
> Why he has a shot: For all the huge numbers David Klingler and Andre Ware put up, neither led the Cougars to a conference championship. It was all big numbers and disappointing losses in big games. In this BCS age, an unbeaten season and a spot in a BCS bowl game could trump those outlandish numbers of years past.

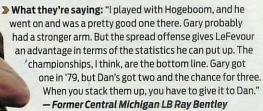
- > Top competition: Andre Ware, 1987-89 (1989 Heisman Trophy winner, 8,202 passing yards); David Klingler, 1988-91 (leader in passing yards in a season, total offense in a season and career TD passes).
- > What they're saying: "He had a prolific season last year, and not many people know about it. He's working with a terrific coaching staff-a group of guys that really know how to exploit defenses. He's still growing into the system, and will only get better." - Former Houston QB Andre Ware
- > Will he do it? Maybe. The issue isn't Keenum's numbers-5,241 yards of total offense and 51 total touchdowns last season—it's the defense's ability to stop teams. Keenum will put up Klingler-type stats, but the defense will struggle to hold its weight in big games. If the Cougars play in a BCS bowl, though, Keenum will move very close to Ware's elite status.

DAN LEFEVOUR

CENTRAL MICHIGAN SENIOR

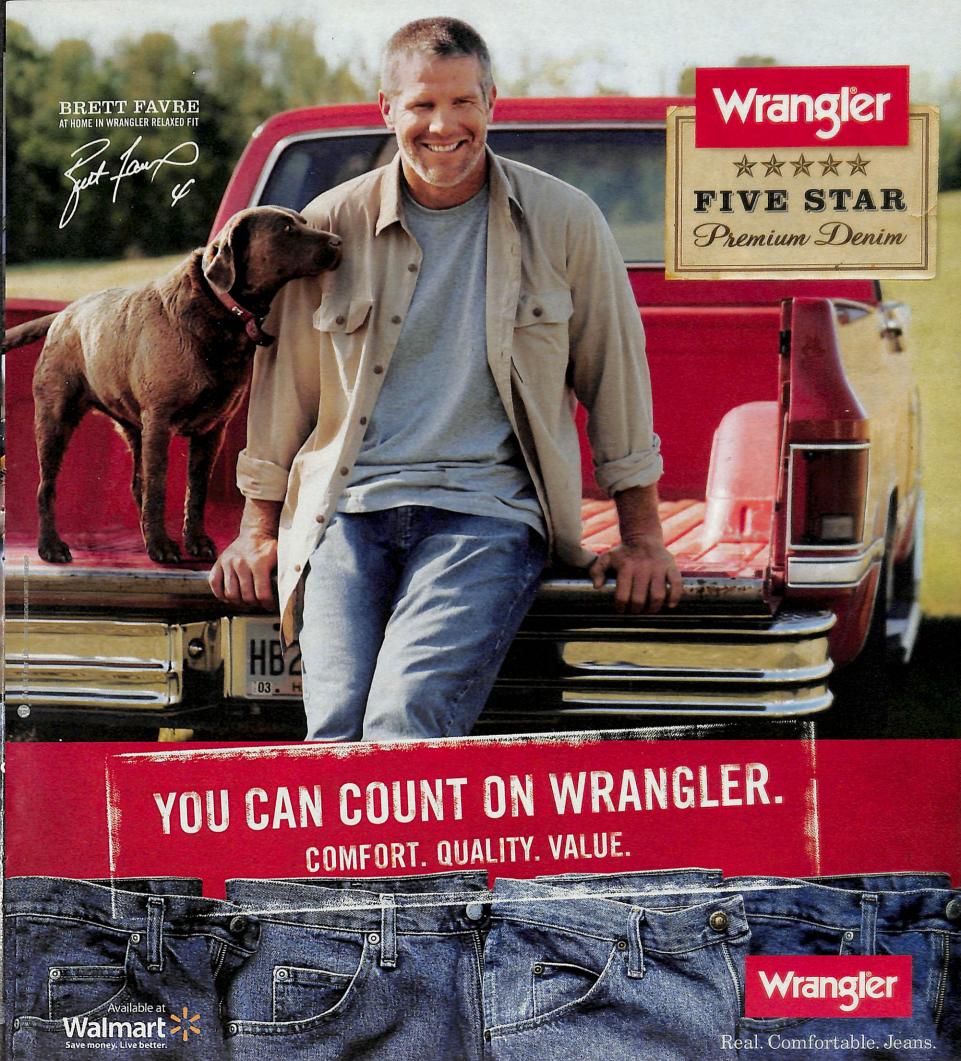
> Why he has a shot: Forget greatest quarterback—LeFevour will rival 1980s linebacker Ray Bentley as the top Chippewa at any position. He ranks 14th in NCAA Division I-A history in career total offense (11,702 yards). He threw for at least 2,500 yards and led the team in rushing each of the past two years. And he helped CMU win MAC titles in 2006 and 2007.





> Will he do it? Yes. With the stats and the championships, LeFevour will spend his senior season putting some distance between himself and CMU quarterbacks past. Barring injury, he'll own every school passing record and perhaps even the school's rushing TDs mark.





YEAR OF THE OB

JEREMIAH MASOLI



> Why he has a shot: Despite what other great quarterbacks have accomplished statistically, none has led Oregon to a truly special season. Even the 2001 Pac-10 championship was minimized for hero Joey Harrington: The Ducks went to the Fiesta Bowl-not the Rose-because the Rose was the national championship game. Snapping USC's hold on the Pac-10 title and winning the Rose Bowl could move Masoli to the top of the group.

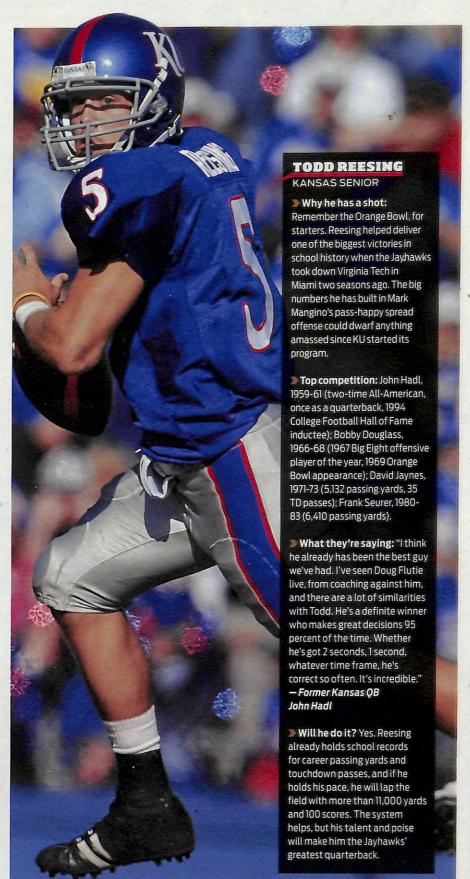
- > Top competition: Bill Musgrave, 1987-90 (leader in passing yards and is one of only six Pac-10 quarterbacks to throw for 8,000 yards and 60 touchdowns); Joey Harrington, 1998-2001 (Oregon's only Heisman Trophy finalist, third in passing yards, total offense and touchdown passes); Dan Fouts, 1970-72 (set 19 school records and was the school's first QB to eclipse 2,000 passing yards in a season).
- > What they're saying: "Being a junior college guy, it took some time for Jeremiah to adjust to the game. It's not easy to jump right in with the difference in the speed of the game. Wait until you see him this year. He has a chance to do things we've never seen here." - Oregon coach Chip Kelly
- > Will he do it? Yes. The West Coast's Tim Tebow opened eyes nationally with a huge Holiday Bowl performance. His bruising running style and strong, accurate arm will cause problems for Pac-10 defenses. He won't have the career numbers of Musgrave or Harrington-or even Chris Miller or Fouts-but he could end up with a Rose Bowl championship and possibly a bronze trophy.

TERRELLE PRYOR

OHIO STATE SOPHOMORE

- > Why he has a shot: His quickness and play outside the pocket remind people of Vince Young or Michael Vick. But Pryor is bigger than those players, and given the firepower the Buckeyes have surrounding him, championships and Heismans await.
- Top competition: Rex Kern, 1968-70 (27-2 as a starter, 1968 national title); Art Schlichter, 1978-81 (four-year starter, leader in passing yards); Troy Smith, 2003-06 (2006 Heisman Trophy winner, Walter
- make some more plays with his arm, he's got a shot to go down as one of the alltime greats. It's too premature to call him the greatest, but if they beat the teams they should beat and he can win some BCS games, he can be in that class." - 1995 Heisman winner and former Ohio State RB Eddie George
- Camp winner, Davey O'Brien winner). > What they're saying: "If he can learn to
- > Will he do it? Yes. Once the class of 2009 moves on, Pryor will become the most talented quarterback in the country and a heavy favorite to win the 2010 Heisman. That year's schedule will give him a shot at an undefeated season and a chance to play for a national title. If he completes enough passes, he'll be the Buckeyes' all-time best.





TOP OF THE DRINK CHAIN.



We distill at a lower proof to give Wild Turkey its benchmark flavor.

We bottle at a higher proof to keep it that way.

Uncompromising since 1855.

Uncompromising people drink responsibly

ZAC ROBINSON

OKLAHOMA STATE SENIOR

- ➤ Why he has a shot: By the end of this season, Robinson should hold every major passing record at Oklahoma State—and the school's all-time rushing record for quarterbacks. He begins this season No. 5 on the NCAA's career active passer rating list, but—more important—he's the leader of a team that could win its first conference championship since 1976.
- ➤ Top competition: Mike Gundy, 1986-89 (leader in completions, attempts, passing yards and completion percentage); Josh Fields, 2001-03 (leader in touchdown passes).
- ➤ What they're saying: "You go back and look at our quarterbacks over the years. Mike (Gundy) had a nice career here, and Josh Fields was pretty damn good. I don't think we've ever had a spectacular quarterback, but Zac Robinson could be that guy."
- Oklahoma State booster T. Boone Pickens

28

>> Will he do it? Yes. Remember when Gundy replaced heralded recruit Bobby



Reid with a skinny kid who played hard? Now look at Robinson: 69 total touchdowns and 7,786 yards of total offense. And the Cowboys are primed for their first 10-win season since 1988. But it's about more than this season: Robinson will go down as the quarterback who turned around the fortunes of a program and set it up for bigger things.

JEVAN SNEAD

MISSISSIPPI JUNIOR

humble and talented.

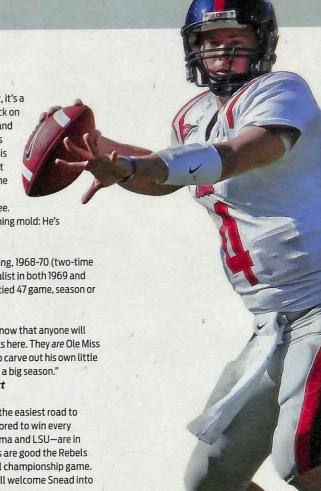
> Why he has a shot: Let's face it, it's a slim chance—and that's not a knock on his ability. The Mannings—Archie and Eli—are legendary in Oxford. One is the face of the program; the other is the son who set all the records. But should Snead lead the Rebels to the SEC title (and maybe more?), the Big Two could become the Big Three. Snead fits perfectly with the Manning mold: He's

➤ Top competition: Archie Manning, 1968-70 (two-time All-American, Heisman Trophy finalist in both 1969 and '70); Eli Manning, 2000-03 (set or tied 47 game, season or career school records).

➤ What they're saying: "I don't know that anyone will ever take the place of the Mannings here. They are Ole Miss football. But Jevan has a chance to carve out his own little piece of history. He's ready to have a big season."

- Mississippi coach Houston Nutt

➤ Will he do it? No. Ole Miss has the easiest road to the SEC title game and will be favored to win every game but two. Those two—Alabama and LSU—are in Oxford. Win the SEC, and the odds are good the Rebels will find a way to the BCS national championship game. Win the SEC, and the Mannings will welcome Snead into the club.



ROBINSON: AIKEN / US PRESSWIRE; WILLIAMS: SCOTT BOEHM / GETTY IMAGES; SNEAD: STEW MILNE / US PRESSWIRE



JUICE WILLIAMS

ILLINOIS SENIOR

- ▶ Why he has a shot: The Illini history book lacks the depth of outstanding quarterbacks other schools can boast. Williams' throwing and running, though, helped lead a program from destitute to the Rose Bowl in two seasons. And, as a four-year starter, he should hold many of the program's passing records when he leaves Champaign.
- Top competition: Tony Eason, 1981-82 (7,031 passing yards, 38 TD passes); Jeff George, 1988-89 (5,189 passing yards, 31 TD passes, No. 1 pick in the 1990 NFL draft); Kurt Kittner, 1998-2001 (8,722 passing yards, 70 TD passes, 2001 Big Ten title and Sugar Bowl appearance); Jack Trudeau, 1981-85 (8,725 passing yards, 55 TD passes, 1983 Big Ten title and Rose Bowl appearance).
- ▶ What they're saying: "I've had the view that the job of the quarterback is to win games. So if Juice can get his team a Big Ten championship and back to a major bowl this year, then he's got to be in the top three or four. He's not perfect, but he's brought this program from oblivion back to respectability and beyond."
- Former Illinois QB Jack Trudeau
- Will he do it? No. Illinois fans will always cherish the shock and joy of the 2007 Rose Bowl season. But last year's 5-7 disappointment—and his inability to put up big passing numbers—will leave him short.



RUSSELL WILSON

N.C. STATE SOPHOMORE

- ➤ Why he has a shot: Athletic enough to play outfield for the Wolfpack's baseball team, Wilson has the most physical talent of any quarterback to enroll at N.C. State. The tutoring of quarterbacks coach Dana Bible, who helped mentor Matt Ryan at Boston College, will give him a chance to play far better as a senior than he did as a freshman.
- ➤ Top competition: Roman Gabriel, 1959-61 (twotime All-American); Erik Kramer, 1985-86, (1986 ACC player of the year); Jamie Barnette, 1996-99 (9,461 passing yards, 59 TD passes); Philip Rivers, 2000-03 (13,484 passing yards, 95 TD passes, 2003 ACC player of the year, No. 4 pick in the 2004 NFL draft).
- ➤ What they're saying: "Like everybody else, he needs to stay healthy. But he's very smart, very athletic and one of those rare kids who can do some unique things on the field. With the coaching staff they have there, he has a chance to develop into a great one." Akron offensive coordinator and former N.C. State QB Shane Montgomery
- ➤ Will he do it? No. Too many red flags—the injuries as a freshman, the possibility he'll pursue baseball full time—and the numbers Rivers posted leave little hope for Wilson to be the Wolfpack's greatest ever.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

YEAR OF THE QB

THE BEST OF THE REST

THEIR NAMES MAY NOT BE AS BIG, BUT THEIR PLACE IN SCHOOL HISTORY WILL BE



MATT GROTHE, South Florida senior. If you're the successful quarterback of a program still in its infancy (ninth season in Division I-A) and you lead the team to a No. 2 ranking (happened briefly in 2007), you're a lock

for best-ever. Grothe is one of two players in Big East history to rack up 10,000 yards of total offense, and he has led the Bulls to 26 wins and three straight bowl games.



TIM HILLER, Western Michigan senior. If Hiller can lead the Broncos to their second league championship in school history, his record-setting numbers will secure his spot as Western Michigan's greatest quarterback.



COLIN KAEPERNICK, **Nevada junior**. The Wolf Pack QBs have a history of big arms, but none has been as dynamic as Kaepernick. In two seasons, he has 6,747 all-purpose yards and 64 touchdowns.



KELLEN MOORE, Boise State sophomore.

As the program has grown, so has the stature of its quarterbacks: from Bart Hendricks to Ryan Dinwiddje to Jared Zabransky. Moore, however, will have four years in

the same system—and three more years of similar production (3,486 passing yards, 25 TD passes) will easily make him the best ever.



RILEY SKINNER, Wake Forest senior. Skinner was the star of the Deacons' 2006 ACC championship season, their first conference title since 1970. His passing numbers (34 TDs, 25 interceptions) aren't as significant as this

number: 26 wins as a starter.



RUSTY SMITH, Florida Atlantic senior. He's already the greatest quarterback in the brief Division I history of the school. Smith holds virtually every career record and this fall likely will surpass 10,000

career passing yards.



TREVOR VITTATOE, UTEP junior. Jordan Palmer (11,084 yards, 88 TDs) became the program's career passing leader under coach Mike Price, and Vittatoe (6,375 yards, 58 TDs) should pass him, barring injury.

- Matt Hayes



MAX HALL, BYU SENIOR QUARTERBACK

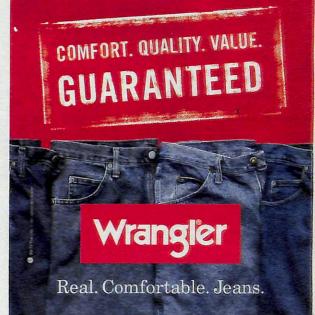
The numbers: Last season, Hall ranked ninth in Division I-A in total offense (313.2 yards per game). He threw for 3,957 yards and 35 touchdowns and had this eye-bulging line in BYU's 59-0 rout of UCLA: 27-of-35, 271 yards, seven touchdowns.

➤ Did you know ... Hall's uncle is former Dallas Cowboys quarterback Danny White, who held seven NCAA records when he finished his career at Arizona State. Hall's grandfather, Wilford "Whizzer" White, also was a star at Arizona State; he led the nation in rushing and all-purpose yards in 1950. Both Whites had their numbers retired at ASU.

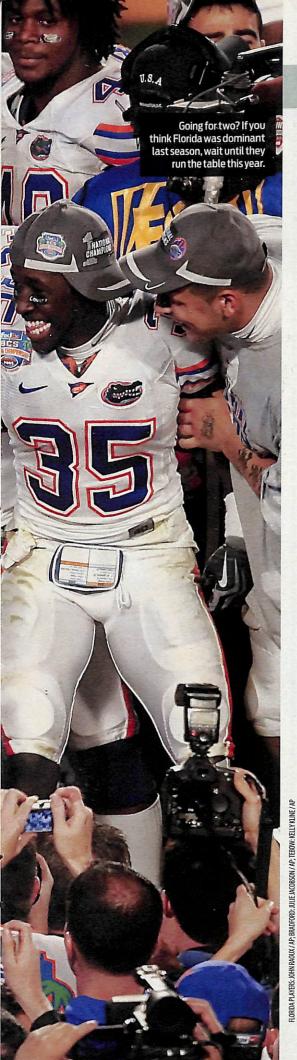
➤ What's on tap: Hall has been provided the stage to play his way into the Heisman Trophy conversation. The Cougars open the season against Oklahoma in Arlington, Texas, and two weeks later, they face Florida State in Provo.

➤ What they're saying: "It's his experience and maturity. He's been involved as a player in college football since 2004. Tactically, you're not going to surprise him." — Air Force coach Troy Calhoun

- Derek Samson







SN ALL-AMERICANS

OFFENSE

OBTIMTEBOW, Sr., Florida

RB KENDALL HUNTER, Jr., Oklahoma State

RB JONATHAN DWYER, Jr., Georgia Tech

OL BRYAN BULAGA, Jr., lowa

OL CIRON BLACK, Sr., LSU

OL RODNEY HUDSON, Jr., Florida State

OL BRANDON CARTER, Sr., Texas Tech

OL KRISTOFER O'DOWD, Jr., USC

WR DEZ BRYANT, Jr., Oklahoma State

WR ARRELIOUS BENN, Jr., Illinois

TE JERMAINE GRESHAM, Sr., Oklahoma

DEFENSE

DL GEORGE SELVIE, Sr., South Florida

DL JERRY HUGHES, Sr., TCU

DL NDAMUKONG SUH, Sr., Nebraska

DL GERALD MCCOY, Jr., Oklahoma

LB BRANDON SPIKES, Sr., Florida

LB ROLANDO MCCLAIN, Jr., Alabama

LB SERGIO KINDLE, Sr., Texas

DB ERIC BERRY, Jr., Tennessee DB JOE HADEN, Jr., Florida

DB WALTER THURMOND, Sr., Oregon

DB TAYLOR MAYS, Sr., USC

SPECIALISTS

KKAI FORBATH, Jr., UCLA

KR PERRISH COX, Sr., Oklahoma State

PROSS THEVENOT, Sr., Tulane

PR BRANDON JAMES, Sr., Florida

THE 2009 HEISMAN: A THREE-MAN RACE

Sporting News college football writers Dave Curtis and Matt Hayes say Florida quarterback Tim Tebow will grab the season's biggest award, taking back the trophy he won as a sophomore from Oklahoma's Sam Bradford, who won it last year. Another guy with a Heisman vote, 1996 Heisman winner Danny Wuerffel, sees things the same way.



Danny Wuerffel, former Florida QB 1996 Heisman winner

- 1. TIM TEBOW, OB, Florida
- 2. COLT MCCOY, QB, Texas
- 3. SAM BRADFORD, QB, Oklahoma
- 4. JAHVID BEST, RB, California
- 5. ERIC BERRY, S, Tennessee
- 6. TERRELLE PRYOR, QB, Ohio State
- 7. DEZ BRYANT, WR, Oklahoma State



Dave Curtis, SN

- 1. TIM TEBOW, QB, Florida
- 2. COLT MCCOY, QB, Texas
- 3. SAM BRADFORD, QB, Oklahoma
- 4. DEZ BRYANT, WR. Oklahoma State
- 5. DARYLL CLARK, QB, Penn State
- 6. JONATHAN DWYER, RB, Georgia Tech
- 7. JAHVID BEST, RB, California



Matt Hayes,

- 1. TIM TEBOW, QB, Florida
- 2. SAM BRADFORD, QB, Oklahoma
- 3. COLT MCCOY, QB, Texas
- 4. JEVAN SNEAD, QB, Mississippi
- 5. JEREMIAH MASOLI, QB, Oregon
- 6. JONATHAN DWYER, RB, Georgia Tech
- 7. DEZ BRYANT, WR, Oklahoma State





Bradford and Tehow own one Heisman each. Expect one of them-likely Tebow-to break the tie this season.

TRUE OR FALSE?

WE TOOK OUR PREDICTIONS TO THOSE WHO KNOW THE LEAGUE BEST

WE SAY: Georgia Tech running back Ionathan Dwyer will challenge for the NCAA rushing title, and the Yellow Jackets will win double-digit games for the first time since 1998.



Hamilton

Former Georgia Tech All-American IOE **HAMILTON** says: "You know, at first

Jonathan wasn't too enthused about being a fullback with his hand on the ground.

Then he saw what he could accomplish in Coach (Paul) Johnson's offense and he just flourished in it. He's going to lead the nation in rushing because we'll be more comfortable in the option offense. People thought they had trouble stopping us last year—wait until they see the offense this season."

WE SAY: Florida State will win the ACC Atlantic Division, and coach Bobby Bowden will retire at the end of the season.



Terry Bowden

North Alabama coach TERRY **BOWDEN** says:

"That's false. How do Iknow? Because I just asked him and he told me so. He said, 'I'm not retiring at the end

of the season.' Now there may be a new president at the school and he may not want him or (coach-inwaiting) Jimbo Fisher. We don't know that. I do know Christian Ponder is a more mature and confident quarterback, and they'll win the Atlantic Division."

WE SAY: N.C. State will be in position to win the Atlantic Division until mid-November.



Cunningham

ESPN analyst **ED CUNNINGHAM**

savs: "I'm taking issue with the words until mid-November, which are probably used because of late road games against Florida

State, Boston College and Virginia Tech. N.C. State will be in a position to win the Atlantic on November 28 at home against North Carolina. The Wolfpack were solid down the stretch in 2008 and have two good lines returning. They're good enough to compete with any ACC team if Russell Wilson can simply remain as turnover resistant as he was in '08."



WE SAY: Virginia Tech will get a big-game win and be a national title contender.



Bobby Bowden

Florida State coach BOBBY **BOWDEN** says: "(Coach) Frank (Beamer) has done a great job at Virginia Tech, no doubt about

that. They are a force every year. I equate it to putting. He's lipped out so many times, one's going to fall before long."

WE SAY: Miami will finish fourth in the Coastal Division, leaving coach Randy Shannon in a win-big-or-walk situation for 2010.



Former Miami and current Chicago Bears tight end GREG OLSEN says:

"They'll be a lot better this year. Randy's doing a good job with them. They have two back-to-back good recruiting classes, and it's about time for some of those kids to mature. It was very hard, last year, trying to win with as many freshmen as they had playing. It's the nature of college football for people to question him. But they almost got into the ACC championship game last year with a bunch of true freshmen. There's no reason they can't be right there again."

ACC

SN ALL-CONFEREI

OFFENSE

QB RUSSELL WILSON, Soph., N.C. State

RB JONATHAN DWYER, Jr., Georgia Tech

RB C.J. SPILLER, Sr., Clemson

OL ED WANG, Sr., Virginia Tech

OL RODNEY HUDSON, Jr., Florida State

OL MATT TENNANT, Sr., Boston College

OL THOMAS AUSTIN. Sr., Clemson

OL JASON FOX. Sr., Miami

WR RICH GUNNELL, Sr., Boston College

WR JACOBY FORD, Sr., Clemson

TE GREG BOONE, Sr., Virginia Tech

DEFENSE

DL DERRICK MORGAN, Jr., Georgia Tech

DL BOO ROBINSON, Sr., Wake Forest

DL VINCE OGHOBAASE, Sr., Duke

DL JASON WORILDS, Jr., Virginia Tech

LB DEKODA WATSON, Sr., Florida State

LB QUAN STURDIVANT, Jr., North Carolina

LB ALEX WUJCIAK, Jr., Maryland

DB RAS-I DOWLING, Jr., Virginia

DB STEPHAN VIRGIL, Sr., Virginia Tech

DB MORGAN BURNETT, Jr., Georgia Tech

DB DEUNTA WILLIAMS, Jr., North Carolina

SPECIALISTS

K TRAVIS BALTZ, Jr., Maryland

P MATT BOSHER, Jr., Miami

PROIECTED FINISH

ATLANTIC

1. FLORIDA STATE	9-3 (7-1)
2. N.C. STATE	9-3 (5-3)
3. WAKE FOREST	8-4 (5-3)
4. CLEMSON	7-5 (4-4)
5. MARYLAND	6-6 (3-5)
6. BOSTON COLLEGE	3-9 (0-8)

COASTAL

1. VIRGINIA TECH	10-2 (7-1)
2. GEORGIA TECH	9-3 (6-2)
3. NORTH CAROLINA	9-3 (5-3)
4. MIAMI	7-5 (4-4)
5. VIRGINIA	4-8 (1-7)
6. DUKE	3-9 (1-7)

COACH OF THE YEAR TOM O'BRIEN, N.C. STATE



PLAYER OF THE YEAR JONATHAN DWYER, RB, GEORGIA TECH





THE BEST OF THE ACC

- > Bet to become bowl-eligible first: Wake Forest
- > Chance to upset Virginia Tech: Georgia Tech (October 17, Atlanta)
- > Blog: tomahawknation.com
- > Transfer: Anthony Allen, RB, Georgia Tech (from Louisville)
- > Hitter: Morgan Burnett, S, Georgia Tech
- > Blocking back: Cory Jackson, Maryland
- > Matchup: Jacoby Ford, WR, Clemson vs. Patrick Robinson, CB, Florida State (November 7, Clemson, S.C.)
- > 2-minute offense: Wake Forest
- > Hands: Rich Gunnell, WR, Boston College
- > Foot: Travis Baltz, Maryland
- > Arm: Thaddeus Lewis, Duke
- > Mind: T.J. Yates, QB, North Carolina
- > Impact freshman: Ray Ray Armstrong, S, Miami
- > Bet to be coach-shopping by December:

- > Coaching decision: Randy Shannon's giving Miami's starting quarterback job to Jacory
- Pass rusher: Jason Worilds, DE, Virginia Tech
- > Motivator: Ralph Friedgen, Maryland
- > Personality: Jason Fox, OT, Miami
- > Reason to watch this league: To see whether the rest of the conference has caught up to Paul Johnson's option offense at Georgia Tech
- > Offensive coordinator: Steed Lobotzke, Wake Forest
- Defensive coordinator: Bud Foster, Virginia Tech
- > Position coach: Chuck Amato, Florida State linebackers
- > OB protector: Anthony Castonzo, **Boston College**
- > Overachiever: Wake Forest
- > In man-to-man coverage: Ras-I Dowling, Virginia

- > Controversy: Should Bobby Bowden retire after this season, even if the NCAA allows him to keep all his wins?
- > Intimidator: Allen Bailey, DL, Miami
- > Quote: Vince Oghobaase, DT, Duke
- Defensive line: North Carolina
- > Secondary: Georgia Tech
- > Linebackers: Florida State
- > Bet to be a head coach soon: James Franklin, offensive coordinator, Maryland
- > Kicker with the game on the line: Matt Bosher, Miami
- > Bet for an upset: Miami over Georgia Tech (September 17, Miami Gardens, Fla.)
- > Backup OB: Mike Glennon, N.C. State
- > Between-the-tackles runner: Da'Rel Scott, Maryland
- Play: Georgia Tech's triple option
- Chance for a turnaround: Christian Ponder, QB, Florida State



Best thing I've ever seen reigning ACC rookie of the year N.C. State QB Russell Wilson do on the field

N.C. State DE WILLIE YOUNG says:

"First thing that comes to mind is in his 29-yard touchdown run in the Miami game, He's scrambling across the field and guys are diving and missing him, and he's making them look like fools. You can see their defensive line standing around with their hands on their hips because they're tired now. They can't catch him. You just watch him go from one side of the field to the other and into the end zone. And I could relate because I've had to stand there in practice with my hands on my hips and watch him do the same thing."

Best offensive line

Florida State DT BUDD THACKER says:

"Virginia Tech. Not only are they big, but they have a little guickness and speed to them, so you've got to try and counter that with your quickness. They keep us a little smaller and faster up front. We've just got to be able to counter back with our speed, while they have both (speed and size). After beating the guy in front of you, you've still got to catch (QB) Tyrod Taylor—and that guy can move."



"We feel like we can have a big play on any snap of the ball. For a running back, it's great because you know you are going to get plenty of carries and you also have plenty of chances to block for a teammate and help them have a big play. For a receiver, it's great, too, because you know you are almost always going to face single coverage."



RUSS LANDE'S BEST DRAFT PROSPECTS

- 1. C.J. SPILLER, RB, Clemson
- 2. JONATHAN DWYER, RB, Georgia Tech
- 3. RICKY SAPP, DE, Clemson
- 4. PATRICK ROBINSON, CB, Florida State
- 5. KAM CHANCELLOR, S, Virginia Tech

Contributing: Matt Crossman, Dave Curtis, Jeff D'Alessio, Matt Hayes







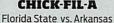
OWL GUESSES

ORANGE Virginia Tech vs. Notre Dame













GATOR Georgia Tech vs. West Virginia





CHAMPS SPORTS N.C. State vs. Illinois





EMERALD Wake Forest vs. UCLA





MEINEKE Clemson vs. South Florida





MUSIC CITY North Carolina vs. South Carolina





Miami vs. Western Michigan





Maryland vs. Army

TRUE OR FALSE?

WE TOOK OUR PREDICTIONS TO THOSE WHO KNOW THE LEAGUE BEST

WE SAY: West Virginia could be a better team in 2009 despite losing the best player in the program's history.



Nehlen

Former West Virginia coach DON **NEHLEN** says:

"I agree totally. Don't misunderstand me-I think Pat White was a great player, But I think we are going to

replace a great player with another great player. Jarrett Brown brings an awful lot to the table. He's big, he's strong, he's fast, and he has an NFL-caliber arm. I think all the stars are aligned for West Virginia to have a great year and win the Big East."

WE SAY: Former Duke point guard Greg Paulus will win the Syracuse quarterback job and deliver an admirable performance after four years away from the sport.



Schever

Duke guard JON **SCHEYER says: "Greg** will be a great fit at Syracuse because he is a hard worker and a great teammate. He is going to do everything he can to help them

win. He is really passionate about both basketball and football, so we really expect him to have a good year. He has been through a lot here at Duke, whether it be starting as a freshman or coming off the bench as a senior. The maturity and understanding he gained from those experiences have helped him develop into an outstanding leader on and off the court or field."

WE SAY: Pitt will win its first outright conference championship in school history.



Fralic

Former Pitt All-American BILL FRALIC says: "My perspective, candidly, is there is no clear-cut favorite in the Big East, But here's why Pitt can do it: The

conference may be down a hair overall, and we have a great defense. The critical part of the equation is quarterback play. I'm cautiously optimistic that whoever plays-Billy Stull or Pat Bostick—there's going to be a bigger impact at that position than in the past."

WE SAY: By the end of the season, Cincinnati coach Brian Kelly will be courted by bigger programs.



Selgo

Grand Valley State (Kelly's former school) athletic director TIM SELGO says: "There's no question a lot of people would want him. First, the man knows how

to win football games. He's done it and won championships at three places. Second, he loves to recruit and he's good at it. And the higher you go on the BCS ladder, the more critical that becomes. And the style of play he's noted for is a style that high school kids love to play. He's very driven to be successful at Cincinnati, and if something else comes of that, that's great. He's only going to another position if it's clearly a better job than what he has."

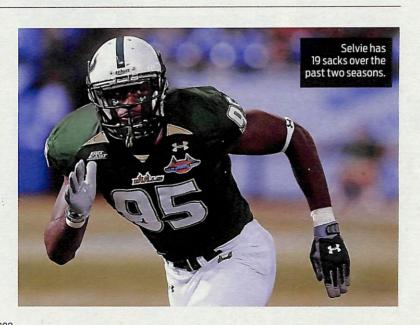
WE SAY: South Florida end George Selvie is college football's most dominant defensive player.



Dana Bible

N.C. State offensive coordinator DANA BIBLE says: "On tape, he's as dominant as anybody that we came across in our conference. And we have some

really good ones in the ACC. High-motor guy that we would have had to account for on every single snap, run or pass. Very, very disruptive. I think he's up there with anyone in the country right now."



BIG EAST SN ALL-CONFERENC TEAM

OFFENSE

QB TONY PIKE, Sr., Cincinnati

RB VICTOR ANDERSON, Soph., Louisville

RB NOEL DEVINE, Jr., West Virginia

OL ANTHONY DAVIS, Jr., Rutgers

OL MOE PETRUS, Soph., Connecticut

OL JASON PINKSTON, Jr., Pitt

OL JIM MCKENZIE, Jr., Syracuse

OL SELVISH CAPERS. Sr., West Virginia

WR MARDY GILYARD, Sr., Cincinnati

WR DOUG BEAUMONT. Jr., Louisville

TE NATE BYHAM, Sr., Pitt

DEFENSE

DL GEORGE SELVIE, Sr., South Florida

DL GREG ROMEUS, Jr., Pitt

DL ARTHUR JONES, Sr., Syracuse

DL SCOOTER BERRY, Jr., West Virginia

LB SCOTT LUTRUS, Jr., Connecticut

LB JON DEMPSEY, Sr., Louisville

LB RYAN D'IMPERIO, Sr., Rutgers

DB AARON BERRY, Sr., Pitt

DB ROBERT VAUGHN, Sr., Connecticut

DB JASPER HOWARD, Jr., Connecticut

DB NATE ALLEN, Sr., South Florida

SPECIALISTS

K SAN SAN TE, Soph., Rutgers

P DESI CULLEN, Sr., Connecticut

PROJECTED FINISH

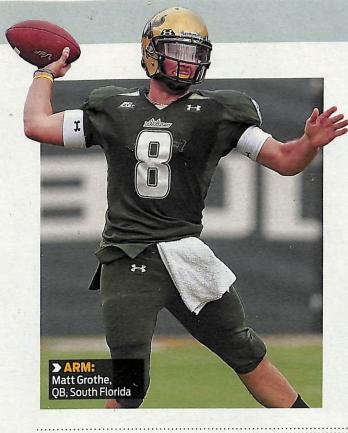
1. PITT	9-3 (6-1)
2. WEST VIRGINIA	8-4 (5-2)
3. SOUTH FLORIDA	.7-5 (5-2)
4. RUTGERS	7-5 (3-4)
5. CINCINNATI	7-5 (3-4)
6. CONNECTICUT	6-6 (3-4)
7. LOUISVILLE	5-7 (2-5)
8. SYRACUSE	4-8 (1-6)

COACH OF THE YEAR DAVE WANNSTEDT.



PLAYER OF THE YEAR MARDY GILYARD. WR. CINCINNATI





THE BEST OF THE BIG EAST

- Bet to become bowl-eligible first: Rutgers
- > Chance to upset Pitt: Cincinnati (December 5, Pitt)
- > Blog: Bulls Report at tbo.com
- > Transfer: Greg Paulus, QB, Syracuse (from Duke)
- > Hitter: Aaron Webster, S. Cincinnati
- > Blocking back: Anthony Sherman,
- > Matchup: West Virginia offense vs. South Florida defense (October 30, Tampa)
- > 2-minute offense: Cincinnati
- > Hands: Mardy Gilvard, WR, Cincinnati
- > Feet: Noel Devine, RB, West Virginia
- > Foot: Rob Long, P, Syracuse
- > Mind: Tony Pike, QB, Cincinnati
- > Impact freshman: Dion Lewis, RB, Pitt
- > Bet to be coach-shopping by December: Louisville

- > Coaching decision: Jim Leavitt's staying at South Florida all these years
- > Pass rusher: George Selvie, DE, South
- > Motivator: Bill Stewart, West Virginia
- > Personality: Greg Romeus, DE, Pitt
- > Reason to watch this league: There's no clear title favorite.
- > Offensive coordinator: Frank Cignetti, Pitt
- Defensive coordinator: Todd
- Orlando, Connecticut
- > Position coach: Doc Holliday. West Virginia fullbacks and tight ends
- > QB protector: Anthony Davis, OT, Rutgers
- > Overachiever: Connecticut
- > In man-to-man coverage: Aaron Berry, Pitt
- > Controversy: Syracuse quarterback
- > Intimidator: Arthur Jones, DT, Syracuse

- > Quote: Brian Kelly, Cincinnati
- > Offensive line: Rutgers
- Defensive line: Pitt
- > Secondary: Connecticut
- > Linebackers: West Virginia
- > Bet to be a head coach soon: David
- Walker, running backs coach, Pitt > Kicker with the game on the line:
- San San Te, Rutgers
- > Bet for an upset: Louisville over West Virginia (November 7, Morgantown, W.Va.)
- > Backup OB: Pat Bostick, Pitt
- Between-the-tackles runner: Victor Anderson, Louisville
- > Play: Syracuse fade route to Mike Williams
- > Chance for a turnaround: Bill Stull, QB, Pitt

RUSS LANDE'S BEST

DRAFT PROSPECTS

Best athletes Cincinnati LB **ANDRE REVELS** says:

"West Virginia because of the overall team speed they have. Their linemen get up to the second level fast, and their running backs always seem like they iust drank a Red Bull before the game. When we play them, I feel like I'm at a track meet."



Best thing about this league that Big East bashers just don't get

Pitt TE NATE BYHAM says:

"Every Big East game has the intensity of a playoff game against a bitter rival, Unlike other leagues, we only play seven conference games, so each week, from September to December, you are playing a game that hugely impacts who is Big East champion and who goes to the BCS. Did I mention the Big East is 3-1 in BCS bowls the last four years?"

Best thing about blocking for reigning Big East rookie of the year Louisville **RB Victor Anderson**

Louisville C MARIO BENAVIDES says:

"It's been a lot of fun because he understands blocking schemes, has outstanding vision and makes our job easier because he's smart. And I think he can be better in his second year."

BEST BOWL GUESSES





SUGAR Pitt vs. Mississippi







South Florida vs. Clemson





ST PETERSBURG Rutgers vs. Southern Miss







BROTHE JOE ROBBINS / GETTY IMAGES; REVELS; JOE ROBBINS / GETTY IMAGES; BYHAME RANDY LITZINGER / ICONSMI; BRINAVIDES; COURTESY DAVE KLOTZ; JONES; SCOTT BOEHM / GETTY IMAGES

1. GEORGE SELVIE, DE, South Florida

4. JEROME MURPHY, CB, South Florida

- Contributing: Dave Curtis, Jeff D'Alessio, Bill Eichenberger, Matt Hayes, Derek Samson

2. ARTHUR JONES, DT, Syracuse

3. ANTHONY DAVIS, OT, Rutgers

5. MARDY GILYARD, WR, Cincinnati

TRUE OR FALSE?

WE TOOK OUR PREDICTIONS TO THOSE WHO KNOW THE LEAGUE BEST

WE SAY: Ohio State will finally win a big nonconference game by knocking off USC in Columbus on September 12.



John Cooper

Former Ohio State coach JOHN **COOPER** says:

"Because the game is played at night in the Horseshoe, I really believe Ohio State

has a good chance of winning. USC is loaded again this year, but they do not have a QB that has played in such a high-profile game. It's hard to win on the road with an inexperienced QB. Ohio State is tough to beat in the 'Shoe. Slight edge to the Buckeyes."



WESAY: Wisconsin's downward trend will continue, and the Badgers will be bowl-less for the first time since 2001.



Blackledge

ESPN analyst and former Penn State **QBTODD BLACKLEDGE** says:

"I disagree with that. They still have a lot of talent on the offensive side of the ball

particularly. They'll be able to move the ball and score. The big caveat for them, though, is they've got to get more consistent play out of the quarterback. That's what hurt them last year. They had a pretty solid team last year. They could run, they had an excellent defense-but the quarterback play was shaky. If they get more consistency from that position, which I would anticipate they will, they can be very competitive and find their way into a bowl game."

WE SAY: Juice Williams will reach his potential and keep the Illini in Big Ten contention for much of the season.



Sean Lee

Penn State linebacker SEAN LEE says: "For sure. It's going to be his fourth year. He's been playing for a long time there, and he's had a pretty

good amount of success in games where he's put it all together. And he's got (receiver Arrelious) Benn. He's got a great chance to have a great year."

WE SAY: With freshman quarterback Tate Forcier, Michigan will return to a bowl game.



Skrepenak

Former Michigan All-American GREG **SKREPENAK** says:

"I certainly would have those high hopes, and I have confidence that Coach (Rich)

Rodriguez can get that done, but I'm also practical in my approach knowing that it's not that easy. What Michigan fights now is not necessarily returning to a bowl game. It's getting the attitude back that was previously there, getting a winning attitude back, because once the losing comes in, once it slips in, it's contagious and it's sometimes hard to get out-especially when adversity hits."

WE SAY: Penn State's soft schedule will hurt when it finally plays a real opponent.



Lloyd Carr

Former Michigan coach LLOYD CARR says: "There's a risk in scheduling, and sometimes it pays off and sometimes it doesn't. There's no question (playing tougher teams) prepares you better for the conference. But we have a national championship game chosen by vote. And nobody puts any consideration on strength of schedule. When the coaches vote, they look at the record. The main thing is, you want to be undefeated."

BIG TEN SN ALL-CONFERENCE

OFFENSE

- **OB DARYLL CLARK, Sr., Penn State**
- RB EVAN ROYSTER, Jr., Penn State
- RB JOHN CLAY, Soph., Wisconsin
- OL STEFEN WISNIEWSKI, Jr., Penn State
- **OL BRYAN BULAGA**, Jr., Iowa
- OL STEPHEN SCHILLING, Jr., Michigan
- OL JOEL FOREMAN, Soph., Michigan State
- OL GABE CARIMI, Jr., Wisconsin
- WR ARRELIOUS BENN, Jr., Illinois
- WR ERIC DECKER, Sr., Minnesota
- TE GARRETT GRAHAM, Sr., Wisconsin

DEFENSE

- DL COREY WOOTTON, Sr., Northwestern
- DL JARED ODRICK, Sr., Penn State
- DL JAMMIE KIRLEW, Sr., Indiana
- DL BRANDON GRAHAM, Sr., Michigan
- LB SEAN LEE, Sr., Penn State
- LB GREG JONES, Jr., Michigan State
- LB NAVORRO BOWMAN, Jr., Penn State
- DB TRAYE SIMMONS, Sr., Minnesota
- DB BRAD PHILLIPS, Sr., Northwestern
- DB KURT COLEMAN, Sr., Ohio State
- DB AMARI SPIEVEY, Jr., lowa

SPECIALISTS

- K PHILIP WELCH, Soph., Wisconsin
- P ZOLTAN MESKO, Sr., Michigan

PROIECTED FINISH

1. OHIO STATE	11-1 (7-1)
2. PENN STATE	10-2 (6-2)
3. MICHIGAN STATE	9-3 (6-2)
4. IOWA	9-3 (5-3)
5. ILLINOIS	8-4 (5-3)
6. MICHIGAN	7-5 (4-4)
7. MINNESOTA	7-5 (4-4)
8. WISCONSIN	5-7 (3-5)
9. NORTHWESTERN	4-8 (2-6)
10. PURDUE	4-8 (1-7)
11. INDIANA	3-9 (1-7)

COACH OF THE YEAR KIRK FERENTZ, IOWA



PLAYER OF THE YEAR ARRELIOUS BENN. WR, ILLINOIS





THE BEST OF THE BIG TEN

- > Bet to become bowl-eligible first: Penn State
- > Chance to upset Ohio State: Michigan (November 21, Ann Arbor, Mich.)
- > Blog: mgoblog.com
- > Transfer: Justin Boren, OL, Ohio State (from Michigan)
- > Hitter: Greg Jones, LB, Michigan State
- > Blocking back: Brett Morse, lowa
- Matchup: Penn State linebackers vs. Ohio State QB Terrelle Pryor (November 7, University Park, Pa.)
- > 2-minute offense: Illinois
- > Hands: Eric Decker, WR, Minnesota
- > Feet: Evan Royster, RB, Penn State
- > Foot: Philip Welch, K, Wisconsin
- > Arm: Ricky Stanzi, Iowa
- > Mind: Mike Kafka, QB, Northwestern
- > Impact freshman: Tate Forcier, QB, Michigan

- > Bet to be coach-shopping by December: Indiana
- > Coaching decision: Penn State defensive line coach Larry Johnson's turning down a coordinator job at Illinois
- > Pass rusher: Jammie Kirlew, DE, Indiana
- > Motivator: Sean Lee, LB, Penn State
- > Personality: Joe Paterno, Penn State
- > Reason to watch this league: Ohio State at Penn State (November 7, University Park, Pa.)
- > Offensive coordinator: Calvin Magee, Michigan
- Defensive coordinator: Jim Heacock, Ohio State
- > Position coach: Erik Campbell, Iowa receivers
- > QB protector: Bryan Bulaga, Iowa
- > Overachiever: Pat Fitzgerald, Northwestern
- In man-to-man coverage: Traye Simmons,

- > Controversy: Rich Rodriguez's job status
- at Michigan
- > Intimidator: Navorro Bowman, LB, Penn State
- **▶ Quote:** Daryll Clark, QB, Penn State
- **➢ Offensive line:** lowa
- > Defensive line: Ohio State
- > Secondary: Northwestern
- > Linebackers: Penn State
- > Bet to be a head coach soon: Luke Fickell, linebackers coach, Ohio State
- > Kicker with the game on the line: Aaron Pettrey, Ohio State
- > Bet for an upset: Wisconsin over Michigan State (September 26, Madison, Wis.)
- > Backup OB: Eddie McGee, Illinois
- > Between-the-tackles runner: John Clay, RB, Wisconsin
- > Chance for a turnaround: Arrelious Benn, WR, Illinois

Best thing about Minnesota's new-brrr, outdoor-TCF Bank Stadium

Minnesota LB LEE CAMPBELL says:

"It's ours. It's all about the Gophers and the state of Minnesota. The excitement of having football back on campus will be amazing. It is going to really unite past, present and future Golden Gophers."

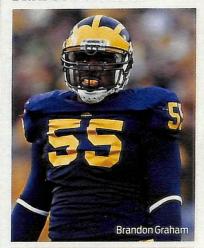


Best defensive front seven

Indiana QB BEN CHAPPELL says:

"Close call, but I would have to say Penn State. They've got those two big monsters coming back in the middle, (Jared) Odrick and (Ollie) Ogbu. They are both huge, and then having Sean Lee come back, he is a good linebacker. All those other guys are good players, too."

RUSS LANDE'S BEST DRAFT PROSPECTS



- 1. BRANDON GRAHAM, DE, Michigan
- 2. ARRELIOUS BENN, WR, Illinois
- 3. COREY WOOTTON, DE, Northwestern
- 4. JON ASAMOAH, OL, Illinois
- 5. JARED ODRICK, DT, Penn State

Contributing: Ken Bradley, Matt Crossman, Dave Curtis, Jeff D'Alessio, Derek Samson

BEST BOWL GUESSES

Illinois QB JUICE WILLIAMS says:

"He is a guy with sure hands, and the first

defender can never bring him down. Sometimes

the second can't, either. If the coaches would let

me, I would throw to him 30 out of 30 times and he would come out with 31 catches."

















TRUE OR FALSE?

WE TOOK OUR PREDICTIONS TO THOSE WHO KNOW THE LEAGUE BEST

WE SAY: Taylor Potts will follow in the footsteps of his Texas Tech predecessors and lead the nation in passing vardage.



Mike Leach

Red Raiders coach MIKE LEACH says: "Whether Taylor does or not, our team will. He may not play all four quarters of every game to lead the

nation. This is a team game, and we'll lead the nation as a team. People look at what we do and think anyone can come in and do it immediately. That 'system' stuff is a joke. Every offense is a system. It takes years of training and repetition from all positions on the offense. You're not stepping on the field and lobbing touchdown passes everywhere."



WE SAY: In the Oklahoma-Texas game, the Longhorns will take advantage of the Sooners' young line and pressure quarterback Sam Bradford into mistakes that will lead to a Texas win.

Former Oklahoma

SWITZER says: "

don't expect Sam to

fall off from last year. I

expect him to step up

even more. You say

the line may be a question, but Sam

will be even better. And that's a factor

you can't ignore. He knows where the

advantage. His experience gives him

an even greater advantage than he

so quickly. That's a tremendous

ball is going, and the ball is out of there

coach BARRY



Barry Switzer

his second rebuilding project at Kansas State more difficult because the Big 12 is stronger today than the Big Eight was 20 years ago. Former Oklahoma

WE SAY: Bill Snyder will find



Tony Casillas

All-American TONY CASILLAS says: "Because of his reputation and history at the school, I don't think it will be that hard for Bill

Snyder to bring that program back to some prominence. I think it is all going to depend on how much energy he has after being out of the game. He's not a young guy anymore. But if anyone can do it, he will."

WE SAY: Nebraska's defense will resemble the great Blackshirt units of the '90s-not those of the Bill Callahan era.



Trev Alberts

Former Nebraska All-American TREV **ALBERTS** says: "One of the most exciting things is seeing the level of emotion and effort they're playing

with. No matter what you're doing in this state, you must give everything you have. I don't think they have better talent than in the past, but they're doing a good job getting those kids to buy in. (Ndamukong) Suh has the ability and took the steps last year to separate himself from some of the great defensive linemen we had here in the past. He's not even close to reaching his potential, either."

WE SAY: Kansas quarterback Todd Reesing is listed at 5-11, but he's really 5-9.

has had in the past."



Jalil Brown

Colorado cornerback JALIL BROWN says: "I can't say for sure because I've only stood next to him when he has his helmet on. I will say that he's at least a little bit shorter than most of the other guys. But when he played against us, his size didn't matter that much. He just knows what he's supposed to do. When you're going into a game and in a film room, as a defense we know what our holes are. And the game starts, and he's realized them all. And he's just back there, picking them out. His size doesn't hurt him doing that."

BIG 12

SN ALL-CONFERENCE TEAM

OFFENSE

OB SAM BRADFORD, Jr., Oklahoma

RB DEMARCO MURRAY, Jr., Oklahoma

RB KENDALL HUNTER, Jr., Oklahoma State

OL BRANDON CARTER, Sr., Texas Tech

OL ADAM ULATOSKI, Sr., Texas

OL TRENT WILLIAMS, Sr., Oklahoma

OL RUSSELL OKUNG, Sr., Oklahoma State

OL NICK STRINGER, Sr., Kansas State

WR DEZ BRYANT, Jr., Oklahoma State

WR JORDAN SHIPLEY, Sr., Texas

TE JERMAINE GRESHAM, Sr., Oklahoma

DEFENSE

DL NDAMUKONG SUH, Sr., Nebraska

DL GERALD MCCOY, Jr., Oklahoma

DL BRANDON HAROLD, Soph., Kansas State

DL SERGIO KINDLE, Sr., Texas

LB SEAN WEATHERSPOON, Sr., Missouri

LB JOE PAWELEK, Sr., Baylor

LB TRAVIS LEWIS, Soph., Oklahoma

DB DARRELL STUCKEY, Sr., Kansas

DB JORDAN LAKE, Sr., Baylor

DB DOMINIQUE FRANKS, Jr., Oklahoma

DB EARL THOMAS, Soph., Texas

SPECIALISTS

K ALEX HENERY, Jr., Nebraska

P DEREK EPPERSON, Jr., Baylor

PROJECTED FINISH

NORTH

1. KANSAS	10-2 (6-2)
2. NEBRASKA	9-3 (6-2)
3. MISSOURI	7-5 (4-4)
4. COLORADO	6-6 (3-5)
5. KANSAS STATE	5-7 (2-6)
6. IOWA STATE	3-9 (0-8)

SOUTH

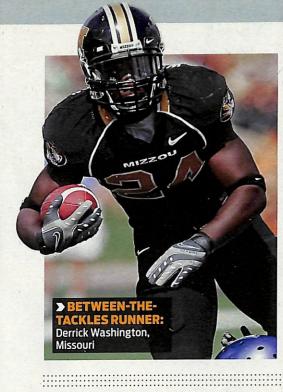
1. TEXAS	11-1 (7-1)
2. OKLAHOMA	11-1 (7-1)
3. OKLAHOMA STATE	10-2 (6-2)
4. TEXASTECH	7-5 (3-5)
5. BAYLOR	6-6 (3-5)
6. TEXAS A&M	4-8 (1-7)

COACHOFTHEYEAR MACK BROWN,



PLAYER OF THE YEAR SAM BRADFORD. OB, OKLAHOMA





THE BEST OF THE BIG 12

- > Bet to become bowl-eligible first: Kansas
- > Chance to upset Texas: Oklahoma State (October 31, Stillwater, Okla.)
- > Blog: collegesportsblog.dallasnews.com
- > Transfer: Phil Taylor, DT, Baylor (from Penn State)
- > Hitter: Jordan Lake, S, Baylor
- > Blocking back: Matt Clapp, Oklahoma
- Matchup: Oklahoma State's backs and receivers vs. Oklahoma's back seven (November 28, Norman, Okla.)
- > 2-minute offense: Oklahoma
- > Hands: Kerry Meier, WR, Kansas
- > Feet: DeMarco Murray, RB, Oklahoma
- > Foot: Derek Epperson, P, Baylor
- Arm: Sam Bradford, Oklahoma
- > Mind: Todd Reesing, QB, Kansas
- > Impact freshman: Christine Michael, RB, Texas A&M

- ▶ Bet to be coach-shopping by December:
- > Coaching decision: Texas defensive coordinator Will Muschamp's becoming UT's head coach designate
- > Pass rusher: Ndamukong Suh, DT, Nebraska
- > Motivator: Colt McCoy, QB, Texas
- > Personality: Gerald McCoy, DT, Oklahoma
- > Reason to watch this league: Points > Offensive coordinator: Kevin Wilson,
- Oklahoma
- Defensive coordinator: Will Muschamp, Texas
- > Position coach: Brian Cabral, Colorado linebackers
- > OB protector: Russell Okung, Oklahoma
- > Overachiever: Robert Griffin, QB, Baylor
- > In man-to-man coverage: Dominique Franks, Oklahoma

- > Controversy: Who's the league's best offensive player?
- > Intimidator: Jermaine Gresham, TE, Oklahoma
- > Ouote: Gerald McCov, DT, Oklahoma
- > Offensive line: Texas &
- > Defensive line: Oklahoma
- > Secondary: Colorado
- > Linebackers: Oklahoma
- > Bet to be a head coach soon: Brent Venables, defensive coordinator, Oklahoma
- > Kicker with the game on the line: Alex Henery, Nebraska
- > Bet for an upset: Kansas State over Kansas (November 7, Manhattan, Kan.)
- > Backup OB: Tyler Hansen, Colorado
- > Play: Any Oklahoma State offensive snap
- > Chance for a turnaround: Cody Hawkins, OB, Colorado

Best player no one is talking about Colorado LB

JEFF SMART says:

"(Missouri's) Derrick Washington was a thousand-yard rusher and a good pass receiver. He's the returning star from a very good offense that has to replace a lot of people, but I would imagine he'll be a calming influence as the replacements for (Chase) Daniel, (Jeremy) Maclin and (Chase) Coffman develop in their roles."

RUSS LANDE'S BEST

DRAFT PROSPECTS

1. SAM BRADFORD, QB, Oklahoma

2. NDAMUKONG SUH. DT. Nebraska

4. TRENT WILLIAMS, OT, Oklahoma

5. DEZ BRYANT, WR, Oklahoma State

Bill Eichenberger, Matt Hayes, Derek Samson

Contributing: Dave Curtis, Jeff D'Alessio,

3. JERMAINE GRESHAM, TE, Oklahoma

COLORADO

Best home crowd Baylor C J.D. WALTON says:

"It would have to be Texas A&M's Kyle Field when the crowd locks arms, swavs back and forth and does the chants. It gets loud and makes it look like the whole stadium is moving."

Best case for Oklahoma State's Dez Bryant as college football's No. 1 wideout

Oklahoma State QB **ZAC ROBINSON says:**

"The guy is a beast. He can beat you with his speed, or he can outjump you, or he can rip the ball out of your hands with his strength. His body control in the air is unbelievable, and his hands are huge. There isn't another receiver in the country who can do the things he can. He's like Larry Fitzgerald when the ball is in the air and Anguan Boldin when he's running with it."





BCS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Texas vs. Florida











Oklahoma vs. Boise State

COTTON Oklahoma State





Kansas vs. Oregon



Iowa vs. Michigan State

vs. Georgia











INDEPENDENCE Texas Tech vs. California

Baylor vs. Auburn





Missouri vs. Minnesota







Colorado vs. Navv

TRUE OR FALSE?

WE TOOK OUR PREDICTIONS TO THOSE WHO KNOW THE LEAGUE BEST

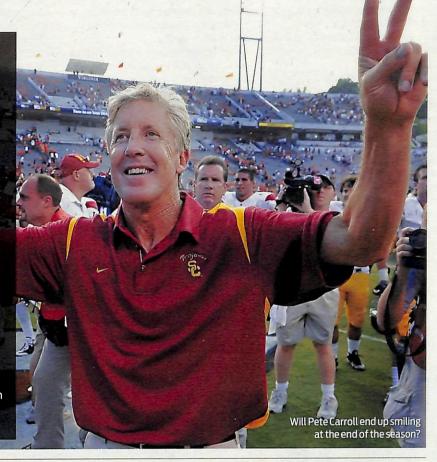
WE SAY: USC again will claim it's the best team in the nation at the end of the season, but it won't play in the national championship game.



Robinson

Former USC coach JOHN savs: "That's false. This is the year they're going to be in it. I

think Texas and Oklahoma are going to knock each other out. I'm a believer in (quarterback) Aaron Corp—and I'm a believer in what they do. If Aaron isn't the All-American-type quarterback, he can be efficient enough to make it work. They don't have to win games 48-14; they can win 28-14."



WE SAY: Coach Jim Harbaugh will lead Stanford to a bowl game for the first time since 2001-then leave for the NFL.



Rod Gilmore

Former Stanford defensive back and ESPN analyst ROD **GILMORE** says: "You're right: Harbaugh will lead Stanford to a bowl. The schedule is better, and Harbaugh has built a tougher, more physical team. Add new QB Andrew Luck-he's legit-to

Toby Gerhart's running, and Stanford will have more offense to go with an underrated defense. But you're wrong about Harbaugh leaving. He knows he's a great fit for the college game. I don't believe he'll consider it until he has built a Rose Bowl contender."

WE SAY: UCLA will return to the top half of the league.



Walter Thurmond

cornerback WALTER THURMOND says: "Coach (Rick) Neuheisel is doing a great

job, and they've

Oregon

got a lot of starters returning. All they need to do is find a quarterback and they can be back in the top half. They have to compete with USC-that's motivation enough."

WE SAY: Oregon QB Jeremiah Masoli will be a Heisman Trophy finalist.



Dan Fouts

Pro Football Hall of Famer and former Oregon quarterback **DAN FOUTS**

says: He's certainly on the

right track. If he can build on his last two games, which were outstanding-great leadership in both of them-if he can play at that level, then you may be talking about a trophy.



Don James

WE SAY: California's Jahvid Best will rush for 2,000 yards.

Former Washington coach DON JAMES says: "He's a great back, but I just know how difficult it is to stay healthy and pick up that many yards. You would have to break a lot of long runs to do something like that. If you just nickel-and-dimed it, picking up 4 or 5 yards a carry, you are going to take a lot of hits. A lot of great running backs have probably had the potential to do it, but how often has it happened?"

PAC-10

SN ALL-CONFERENCE

- OB JEREMIAH MASOLI, Jr., Oregon
- RB JAHVID BEST, Jr., California
- RB JACOUIZZ RODGERS, Soph., Oregon State
- OL JEFF BYERS, Sr., USC
- OL MITCHELL SCHWARTZ, Soph., California
- OL KRISTOFER O'DOWD, Jr., USC
- OL CHARLES BROWN, Sr., USC
- OL CHRIS MARINELLI, Sr., Stanford
- WR DAMIAN WILLIAMS, Jr., USC
- WR JAMES RODGERS, Jr., Oregon State
- TE ROB GRONKOWSKI, Jr., Arizona

DEFENSE

- DL TYSON ALUALU, Sr., California
- DL BRIAN PRICE, Jr., UCLA
- DL WILL TUKUAFU, Sr., Oregon
- DL DEXTER DAVIS, Sr., Arizona State
- LB REGGIE CARTER, Sr., UCLA
- LB KEATON KRISTICK, Sr., Oregon State
- LB MICHAEL MOHAMED, Jr., California
- DB SYD'QUAN THOMPSON, Sr., California
- DB TAYLOR MAYS, Sr., USC
- DB DEVIN ROSS, Sr., Arizona
- DB WALTER THURMOND, Sr., Oregon

SPECIALISTS

- K KAI FORBATH, Jr., UCLA
- P BRYAN ANGER, Soph., California

PROJECTED FINISH

1. USC	10-2 (9-0)
2. OREGON	10-2 (8-1)
3. CALIFORNIA	9-3 (7-2)
4. OREGON STATE	8-4 (5-4)
5. UCLA	* 7-5 (5-4)
6. ARIZONA STATE	6-6 (4-5)
7. STANFORD	6-6 (4-5)
8. ARIZONA	4-8 (2-7)
9. WASHINGTON	2-10 (1-8)
10. WASHINGTON STATE	1-11 (0-9)

COACHOFTHEYEAR CHIP KELLY. OREGON



PLAYER OF THE YEAR JEREMIAH MASOLI, **OB. OREGON**



THE BEST OF THE PAC-10

- > Bet to become bowl-eligible first: USC > Bet to be coach-shopping by
- > Chance to upset USC: Oregon (October 31, Eugene, Ore.)
- > Blog: bruinsnation.com
- > Transfer: Nick Foles, QB, Arizona (from Michigan State)
- > Hitter: Taylor Mays, S, USC
- > Pass rusher: Dexter Davis, DE, Arizona State
- > Blocking back: Stanley Havili, USC
- Matchup: Oregon CB Walter Thurmond vs. USC WR Damian Williams (October 31,
- > 2-minute offense: Oregon
- > Hands: Chris McGaha, WR, Arizona State
- > Foot: Kai Forbath, K, UCLA
- > Arm: Kevin Riley, California
- Mind: Jeremiah Masoli, QB, Oregon
- > Impact freshman: Vontaze Burfict, LB,
- Arizona State

- December: Stanford
- > Coaching decision: UCLA's naming redshirt freshman Kevin Prince starting QB
- > Motivator: Mike Riley, Oregon State
- > Personality: Jeff Byers, G, USC
- > Reason to watch this league: To see which lightweight takes down USC
- > Offensive coordinator: Norm Chow, UCLA
- Defensive coordinator: Nick Holt, Washington
- > Position coach: Chris Ball, Washington State secondary
- > QB protector: Charles Brown, USC
- Overachiever: Toby Gerhart, RB, Stanford
- > In man-to-man coverage: Syd'Quan Thompson, California
- > Controversy: California QBs: Kevin Riley vs. Brock Mansion

- Intimidator: Brian Price, DT, UCLA
- Duote: Jim Harbaugh, Stanford
- > Offensive line: USC
- > Defensive line: California
- > Secondary: USC
- > Linebackers: California
- Bet to be a head coach soon: Sonny Dykes, offensive coordinator, Arizona
- Kicker with the game on the line: Giorgio Tavecchio, California
- Bet for an upset: Boise State over Oregon (September 3, Boise, Idaho)
- > Backup QB: Matt Barkley, USC
- Between-the-tackles runner:
- LeGarrette Blount, Oregon
- > Play: Sprint draw to California **RB Jahvid Best**
- > Chance for a turnaround: Jake Locker, QB, Washington



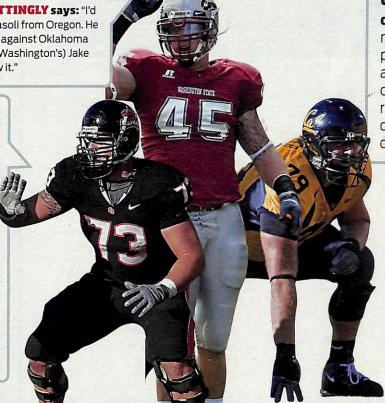
Best dual-threat quarterback

Washington State LB ANDY MATTINGLY says: "I'd probably have to go with Jeremiah Masoli from Oregon. He played really well in the Holiday Bowl against Oklahoma State. It's probably between he and (Washington's) Jake Locker. They can both run it and throw it."

Best thing I've seen reigning SN freshman of the year **Oregon State RB Jacquizz** Rodgers do on the field

Oregon State G GREGG PEAT says:

"Against Arizona State, we were blocking for him. He had three guys on top of him, but he wasn't down-the officials called him down, though. Then, against USC, when he had his helmet ripped off and he just said, 'Screw it' and kept running. The officials stopped that play, too. Pretty much every day in practice and every game, you see him do something that makes you shake your head."



Best thing about blocking for California RB Jahvid Best

California OT MIKE TEPPER says: "It's the moment right after the play starts. The play begins and you execute the blocking assignment, when, all of a sudden, a blur of No. 4 goes flashing right by you. You run down the field following as he makes defenders look absolutely ridiculous. You can do nothing but smile and chuckle."

RUSS LANDE'S BEST **DRAFT PROSPECTS**

- 1. TAYLOR MAYS, S, USC
- 2. TYSON ALUALU, DE, California
- 3. JAHVID BEST, RB, California
- 4. DAMIAN WILLIAMS, WR, USC
- 5. DEXTER DAVIS, DE, Arizona State

Contributing: Matt Crossman, Jeff D'Alessio, Bill Eichenberger, Ryan Fagan, Matt Hayes













Oregon State vs. Utah



California vs. Texas Tech





Stanford vs. BYU









TRUE OR FALSE?

WE TOOK OUR PREDICTIONS TO THOSE WHO KNOW THE LEAGUE BEST



WE SAY: Alabama will take a step back this year after its surprising resurgence in 2008.



Mike Johnson

Tide guard MIKE **IOHNSON** says: "It would be easy for people to see that we've lost our quarterback and a great running back

and some guys in key spots and think we're not going to be the same team. But we've got young guys who are unbelievably talented and ready to play. We've got Coach (Nick) Saban pushing us day after day. We are not the team that lost those last two games last year. We are the team that won those first 12."

WE SAY: Florida will repeat as national champion.



Lane Kiffin

Tennessee coach LANE KIFFIN says: "I think there's going to be a million articles written after Tim (Tebow) has a great year, and I would think

with all the great players, they'll win another national championship and he'll win another Heisman. That wasn't a joke. I was serious about that. I really believe that."

WE SAY: Steve Spurrier will never win big at South Carolina.



Eric Norwood

South Carolina linebacker **ERIC** NORWOOD says: "Expectations haven't

dimmed, and neither has the talent. Our talent is up there with

every other team in the SEC. We're looking forward to winning and winning big. We hear that stuff all the time: Same ol' South Carolina. They're just not good enough. That's crazy talk. Every team is different, every season is different. Why can't it be us this season? It's going to happen. It's just a matter of time."

WESAY: Lane Kiffin will further irritate one of the league's heavyweights with a shocking upset.



Former Georgia coach and 2009 College Football Hall of Fame inductee JIM DONNAN says: "False. I just don't believe they have enough players to beat any of those teams. They're in a rebuilding mode. They don't have an established quarterback. Regardless of how strong the coaches are, it's a different deal in this league."

SEC

SN ALL-CONFERENCE TEAM

OFFENSE

- **QB TIM TEBOW**, Sr., Florida
- RB CHARLES SCOTT, Sr., LSU.
- RB MICHAEL SMITH, Sr., Arkansas
- **OL CIRON BLACK. Sr., LSU**
- OL JOHN JERRY, Sr., Mississippi
- **OL MAURKICE POUNCEY**, Jr., Florida
- **OL JOSH MCNEIL**, Sr., Tennessee
- OL MIKE JOHNSON, Sr., Alabama
- WR A.J. GREEN, Soph., Georgia
- WR JULIO JONES, Soph., Alabama
- TE AARON HERNANDEZ, Jr., Florida

DEFENSE

- DL GREG HARDY, Sr., Mississippi
- DL TED LAURENT. Jr., Mississippi
- DL TERRENCE CODY, Sr., Alabama
- DL CARLOS DUNLAP, Jr., Florida
- LB BRANDON SPIKES, Sr., Florida
- LB RENNIE CURRAN, Jr., Georgia
- LB ROLANDO MCCLAIN, Jr., Alabama
- DB JOE HADEN, Jr., Florida
- DB ERIC BERRY, Jr., Tennessee
- DB AHMAD BLACK, Jr., Florida
- DB TREVARD LINDLEY, Sr., Kentucky

SPECIALISTS

- K JOSHUA SHENE, Sr., Mississippi
- P CHAS HENRY, Jr., Florida

PROJECTED FINISH

EAST

1. FLORIE	A	12-0 (8-0)
2. GEORG	SIA	9-3 (7-1)
3. SOUTI	CAROLINA	8-4 (4-4)
4. TENNI	ESSEE	7-5 (3-5)
5. KENTU	JCKY	6-6 (2-6)
6. VAND	ERBILT	4-8 (1-7)
-		

WEST

	The Party of the Control of the Cont
1. MISSISSIPPI	10-2 (6-2)
2. LSU	10-2 (6-2)
3. ALABAMA	10-2 (6-2)
4. AUBURN	7-5 (3-5)
5. ARKANSAS	6-6 (2-6)
6. MISSISSIPPI STATE	2-10 (0-8)

COACH OF THE YEAR URBAN MEYER, **FLORIDA**



PLAYER OF THE YEAR TIM TEBOW, QB, FLORIDA



THE BEST OF THE SEC

- > Bet to become bowl-eligible first: Florida
- > Chance to upset Florida: LSU (October 10, Baton Rouge, La.)
- > Blog: teamspeedkills.com
- > Transfer: Ryan Mallett, QB, Arkansas (from Michigan)
- > Hitter: Rennie Curran, LB, Georgia
- > Blocking back: Shaun Chapas, Georgia
- > Matchup: Alabama offensive line vs. Mississippi defensive line (October 10, Oxford, Miss.)
- > 2-minute offense: Florida
- > Feet: Michael Smith, RB, Arkansas
- > Foot: Joshua Shene, K, Mississippi
- > Arm: Jevan Snead, Mississippi
- > Mind: Tim Tebow, QB, Florida
- > Impact freshman: Bryce Brown, RB, Tennessee
- > Bet to be coach-shopping by December: South Carolina

- > Coaching decision: Auburn's hiring Gus Malzahn as offensive coordinator
- > Pass rusher: Carlos Dunlap, DE, Florida
- > Motivator: Bobby Johnson, Vanderbilt
- > Personality: Jeff Owens, DT, Georgia
- > Reason to watch this league: The SEC has won four of the past six BCS championships.
- > Offensive coordinator: Gary Crowton, LSU
- > Defensive coordinator: Charlie Strong, Florida
- > Position coach: Jon Fabris, Georgia defensive ends
- > QB protector: Ciron Black, LSU
- > Overachiever: Rich Brooks, Kentucky
- > In man-to-man coverage: Trevard Lindley,
- > Controversy: South Carolina QBs: Stephen Garcia vs. Reid McCollum vs. Aramis Hillary vs. Zac **Brindise**
- > Intimidator: Eric Berry, S, Tennessee

- > Quote: Brandon Spikes, LB, Florida
- > Offensive line: LSU
- > Defensive line: Florida
- > Secondary: Florida
- > Linebackers: Alabama
- > Bet to be a head coach soon: Joker Phillips, offensive coordinator, Kentucky
- > Kicker with the game on the line: Blair Walsh, Georgia
- **▶** Bet for an upset: South Carolina over Mississippi (September 24, Columbia, S.C.)
- > Backup OB: John Brantley, Florida
- > Between-the-tackles runner: Anthony Dixon, Mississippi State
- > Play: Alabama skinny post to Julio Jones
- > Chance for a turnaround: Neil Caudle, QB,



Best thing I learned from watching No. 1 draft pick Matthew Stafford for three seasons

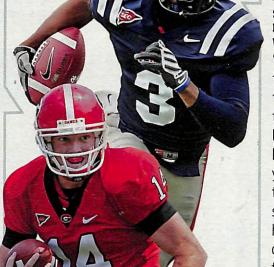
Georgia QB JOE COX says:

"I figured out from Matthew about how to manage a team. He helped me learn how to be not too up when things are going well and not too down when things are rough. It's tough in our league to not get excited, so that's a valuable lesson to know. It was kind of weird but cool to listen and learn from a guy who was younger than I was."



SEC active career catches leader Mississippi WR SHAY HODGE says:

"He just has a knack for putting the ball in the right spot. He will throw a bullet to your left shoulder when you have a defender on your right hip, and he'll throw it soft over your shoulder when you have a step on your defender. It's always a tight spiral and always catchable."



Best player no one is talking about

Vanderbilt RT THOMAS WELCH

says: "While (DE Carlos) Dunlap seems to get all the pub on Florida's defensive line, No. 49-(DE Jermaine) Cunningham—is really a great player. He's a tremendous athlete that gets after it every play. And he's a smart player, a guy that just doesn't make mistakes when you face him. Both of those guys are tremendous, but Cunningham is their top guy."







LSU vs. Penn State

Alabama

vs. Michigan State



CHAMPIONSHIP

Florida vs. Texas

SUGAR

Mississippi vs. Pitt

Arkansas vs. Florida State



Kentucky vs. Connecticut



Tennessee vs. Houston







Contributing: Dave Curtis, Jeff D'Alessio, Matt Hayes

5. BRANDON SPIKES, LB, Florida

RUSS LANDE'S BEST

DRAFT PROSPECTS

1. ERIC BERRY, S, Tennessee

3. TIM TEBOW, QB, Florida

4. CHARLES SCOTT, RB, LSU

2. CARLOS DUNLAP, DE, Florida

OUTSIDE THE BCS

TRUE OR FALSE?

WE TOOK OUR PREDICTIONS TO THOSE WHO KNOW THE TEAMS BEST

WE SAY: Buffalo will win its second straight MAC championship, and coach Turner Gill will land a major BCS job.



Mark May

ESPN analyst MARK MAY says: "I really think if they win the MAC and the right opportunity is out there, yes, he will be gone, He's OK reaping

the rewards of his hard work. ... But he's comfortable in his own skin, doing his own thing in Buffalo. He's not afraid of the cold weather. He still has a home in Green Bay from his NFL years."

WE SAY: TCU will lead the nation in defense and be the team to get snubbed by the BCS this season.



Craig James

WE SAY: Boise State will go undefeated and, amid much controversy, play in a BCS bowl—the Fiesta Bowl.



Chris Aul

Nevada coach CHRIS AULT says: "I don't give the BCS two thoughts, I really don't. In our conference, Boise's been the dominator.

Everybody who plays them certainly points to them, no doubt about it. The Boises of the world, they've proven they can line up with most teams at this point in their program."

WE SAY: Utah's winning streak will end at 16 games when the Utes fall to Oregon in Eugene on September 19.



Craig Thompson

Mountain West commissioner CRAIG THOMPSON

says: "Oregon opens the season at Boise State, hosts Purdue in Week 2 and faces California in Week 4

to start league play. That's a difficult schedule. ... The Ducks may have too much on their minds when the Utes come to town."

ESPN analyst CRAIG JAMES says: "They'll be right with the best defenses in the country and might lead it. Still, they could get left out. Maybe not this year, but they will someday be that team we've seen talked about like Utah and Boise State have been. But I'm afraid it's going to be the same song and dance. The Utahs and TCUs of the world are going to be omitted, and rightly so. They're not being challenged enough to be worthy of playing for the national championship."

- Dave Curtis, Ryan Fagan, Matt Hayes, Derek Samson

SN'S BEST OF THE REST

OFFENSE

- OB CASE KEENUM, Jr., Houston
- RB VAITAUA, Jr., Nevada
- **RB DAMION FLETCHER**, Sr., Southern Miss
- OL ZANE BEADLES, Sr., Utah
- OL ERIC OLSEN, Sr., Notre Dame
- **OL JOHN ESTES**, Sr., Hawaii
- OL SHELLEY SMITH, Sr., Colorado State
- OL SAM YOUNG, Sr., Notre Dame
- WR ANTONIO BROWN, Jr., Central Michigan
- WR GOLDEN TATE, Jr., Notre Dame
- TE DENNIS PITTA, Sr., BYU

DEFENSE

- DL JERRY HUGHES, Sr., TCU
- DL D'ANTHONY SMITH, Sr., Louisiana Tech
- DL ANDRE NEBLETT, Sr., Temple
- DL BRANDON LANG, Sr., Trov
- LB STEVENSON SYLVESTER, Jr., Utah
- LB BEN JACOBS, Jr., Fresno State
- LB BORIS LEE, Sr., Troy
- DB KYLE WILSON, Sr., Boise State
- DB BARRY CHURCH, Sr., Toledo
- DB DAVONTE SHANNON, Jr., Buffalo
- DB ANTHONY GAITOR, Jr., Florida International

SPECIALISTS

- K BEN HARTMAN, Sr., East Carolina
- P ROSS THEVENOT, Sr., Tulane



OUTSIDE THE BCS

CONFERENCE USA

- > Champion: Houston
- > Coach of the year: Kevin Sumlin, Houston
- > Player of the year: Case Keenum, QB, Houston

MAC

- > Champion: Buffalo
- > Coach of the year: Bill Cubit,
- Western Michigan
- > Player of the year: Dan LeFevour, QB, Central Michigan

MOUNTAIN WEST

- > Champion: Utah
- > Coach of the year: Bronco Mendenhall, BYU
- > Player of the year: Jerry Hughes, DE, TCU

SUN BELT

- > Champion: Troy
- > Coach of the year: Steve Roberts,
- Arkansas State
- > Player of the year: Brandon Lang, DE, Troy

WAC

- > Champion: Boise State
- > Coach of the year: Chris Petersen, Boise State
- > Player of the year: Vai Taua, RB, Nevada



BEST BOWL GUESSES

CONFERENCE USA

LIBERTY

Houston vs. Tennessee

ARMED FORCES

Tulsa vs. TCU

ST. PETERSBURG

Southern Miss vs. Rutgers

NEW ORLEANS

East Carolina vs. Troy

INDEPENDENTS

OPANGE

Notre Dame vs. Georgia Tech

EAGLEBANK

Army vs. Maryland

TEXAS

Navy vs. Colorado

MAC

MOTOR CITY

Buffalo vs. Michigan

GMAC

Western Michigan vs. Miami INTERNATIONAL

Bowling Green vs. Cincinnati

MOUNTAIN WEST

LAS VEGAS

Utah vs. Oregon State

POINSETTIA

BYU vs. Stanford

ARMED FORCES

TCU vs. Tulsa

NEW MEXICO

Colorado State vs. Nevada

HUMANITARIAN

Air Force vs. Fresno State

SUN BELT

NEW ORLEANS

Troy vs. East Carolina

WAC

FIESTA

Boise State vs. Oklahoma

NEW MEXICO

Nevada vs. Colorado State

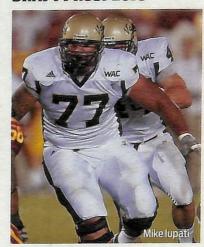
HUMANITARIAN

Fresno State vs. Air Force

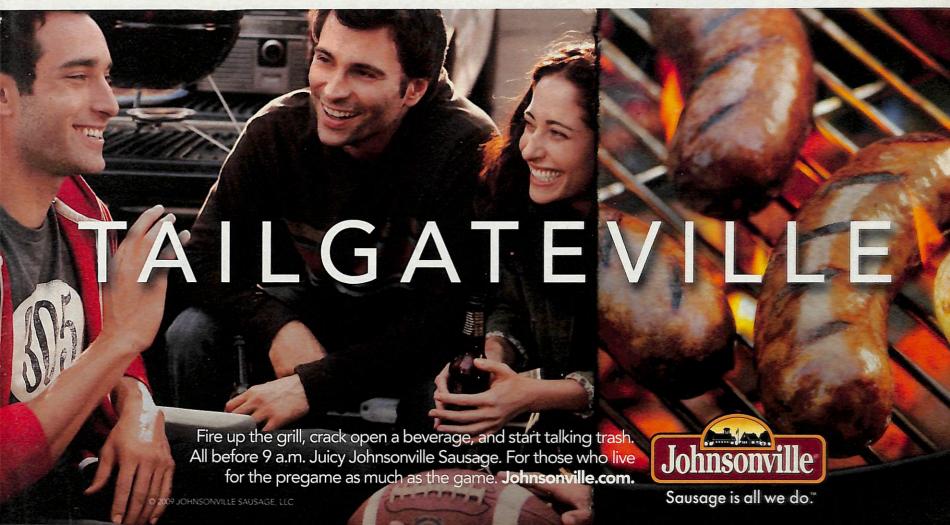
HAMMIN

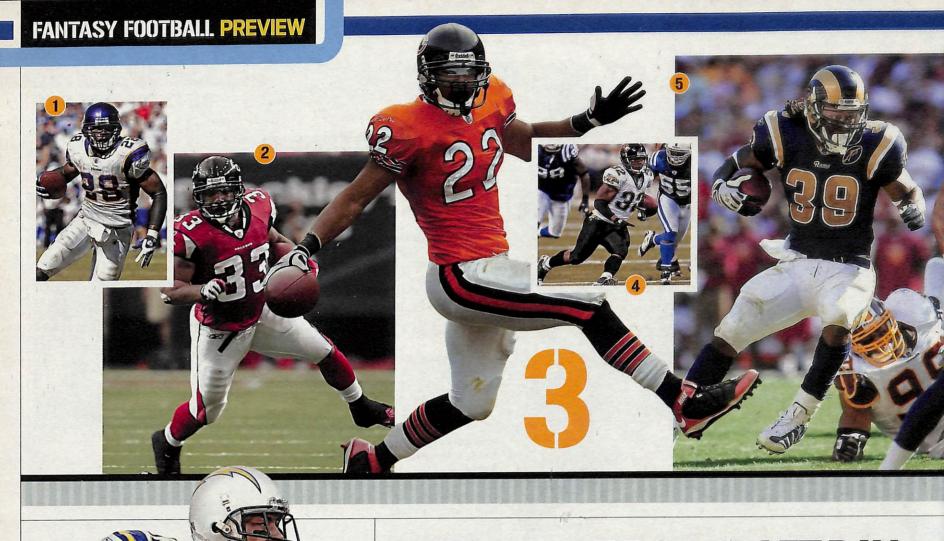
Hawaii vs. Arizona State

RUSS LANDE'S BEST



- 1. MIKE IUPATI, G, Idaho
- 2. BRANDON LANG, DE, Troy
- 3. D'ANTHONY SMITH, DT, Louisiana Tech
- 4. JERRY HUGHES, DE, TCU
- 5. JUSTIN COLE, DE, San Jose State





TAKE 'ALL DAY' ON DRAFT DAY

The Vikings' Adrian Peterson is the first of nine running backs at the top of our 100 best players

By Fantasy Source experts Brad Pinkerton, George Winkler, Bill Bender and Matt Lutovsky

ADRIAN PETERSON, RB, Vikings. In his first two seasons, Peterson averaged 5.2 yards per carry and piled up 22 rushing TDs (one receiving). The scary thing is he hasn't yet peaked.

MICHAEL TURNER, RB, Falcons. In his first season with Atlanta, he proved he can turn a full workload into monster fantasy stats. Turner's encore should be just as impressive.

MATT FORTE, RB, Bears. As a rookie, he racked up 1,238 yards on 316 carries and led all running backs with 63 receptions. Expect Forte to get plenty of work again this year.

MAURICE JONES-DREW, RB, Jaguars. He has high expectations in his first season as Jacksonville's feature back and is even more valuable in leagues that reward receptions.

STEVEN JACKSON, RB, Rams. There's no doubt Jackson is an elite back when healthy, but he has missed four games in each of the past two seasons. He's a high-risk, high-reward pick.

DEANGELO WILLIAMS, RB, Panthers. The top-scoring fantasy back in 2008 surely will regress a bit this season, but Williams' versatility will allow him to remain an elite option in the Panthers' run-heavy offense.

BRANDON JACOBS, RB, Giants. The knock on Jacobs is that he can't stay healthy. True, but this bruising back still topped 1,000 rushing yards and scored 15 TDs despite missing three games last year.

RB, Chargers. Tomlinson, RB, Chargers. Tomlinson has crossed the dreaded 30-year-old threshold, and his numbers have declined in each of the past two seasons—from 1,815 rushing yards to 1,474 to 1,110. Still, those numbers remain among the best.

FRANK GORE, RB, 49ers. Thanks to injuries and San Francisco's poor offense, Gore hasn't come close to replicating his breakout 2006 season, when he rolled up close to 2,200 total yards. But he is a solid No. 1 back.

LARRY FITZGERALD, WR, Cardinals. Fitzgerald has topped 1,400 receiving yards and caught at least 10 TD passes in three of the past four seasons. Plus, the Cardinals will throw often again this year.

46

HIGH-FIVE

MUST-HAVE BARGAINS

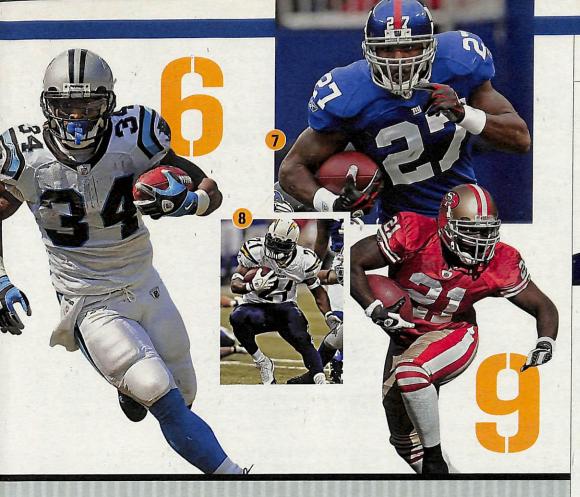
1. Vincent Jackson, WR, Chargers

3. Donovan McNabb, QB, Eagles

4. Bernard Berrian, WR, Vikings

2. Larry Johnson, RB, Chiefs

5. Greg Olsen, TE, Bears



BRIAN WESTBROOK, RB, Eagles. He is another elite back who will turn 30 this season. Plus, Westbrook is coming off ankle surgery. Make sure you grab rookie LeSean McCoy as insurance.

DREW BREES, QB, Saints. There's no reason to think fantasy's top scorer in 2008 won't make another run at the record books in the Saints' pass-happy offense.

CHRIS JOHNSON, RB, Titans. As a rookie, Johnson proved that with his breakaway speed and exceptional hands, he doesn't need goal-line touches to be a No. 1 fantasy back.

CLINTON PORTIS, RB, Redskins. He was impressive in 2008, racking up 1,487 rushing yards with nine TDs on 342 carries. But that heavy workload and his steep second half dropoff are concerns.

ANDRE JOHNSON, WR, Texans. He posted career highs in receptions (115) and yards (1,575) last season and will have a great chance to

match those numbers in Houston's improving passing game.

STEVE SLATON. RB, Texans. After a surprisingly strong rookie season, the speedy Slaton returns as Houston's unquestioned starter and will get plenty of touches.

CALVIN JOHNSON, WR, Lions. Despite Detroit's shaky quarterback situation and facing double-teams much of last season, Megatron still racked up 1,331 receiving yards and 12 TDs. At 6-5, 235, Johnson's size makes him nearly unstoppable.

TIP FROM A PRO

Jaguars RB MAURICE JONES-DREW says ... Study schemes.

You've got to understand the offensive scheme of players you're drafting. That's the most important thing because you don't want to draft Beanie Wells with the Cardinals when you know they're gonna throw the ball 100 times a game. You also want to look at the teams on your player's schedule—how they played against them last year and the defenses they'll face. That's what I look at when I'm drafting.

TIP FROM A PRO

Bears LB HUNTER HILLENMEYER says ...

Take Vikings WR Percy Harvin.

He's going to be a dynamic guy, and they're going to try a whole host of ways to get the ball in his hands. He's going to be interesting and could be valuable.

RANDY MOSS,

WR. Patriots. Speaking of unstoppable, Moss gets Tom Brady back this season. Expect Moss to improve last year's Brady-less numbers (1,008 yards, 11 TDs), but a repeat of 2007 is farfetched.

MARION BARBER. RB, Cowboys, He will be the feature back in an offense that figures to shift more toward the run, but he'll have to fend off Felix Jones and Tashard Choice for touches.

PEYTON MANNING, QB, Colts. He is the most reliable fantasy quarterback around, having topped 4,000 passing yards in nine of the past 10 seasons while averaging 30.7 passing touchdowns in that span.

TOM BRADY, QB, Patriots. Operation Knee Rehabilitation is going as planned. Brady still has the weapons in New England to be a fantasy force, provided his knee holds up.

KEVIN SMITH, RB, Lions, Last season, he was fourth among rookies with 976 rushing yards and averaged more yards per carry (4.1) than Matt Forte (3.9). Don't let the fact Smith plays for the Lions allow you to pass up this all-around back.

STEVE SMITH, WR, Panthers. Even with inconsistent quarterback play and a two-game suspension last year, Smith finished with 1,421 receiving yards and six scores.

PIERRETHOMAS, RB, Saints. He will try to build on a strong finish to the 2008

season, when he averaged 112.8 all-purpose yards and scored nine touchdowns from Weeks 11-16. You have to like the offense he is in.

REGGIE WAYNE, WR, Colts. He cemented his role as the Colts' No. 1 receiver last . season and should be in for even more receptions now that Marvin Harrison is out of the picture.

RYANGRANT, RB, Packers. His running isn't eye-popping, but Grant steadily churns out yardage as his team's go-to back. The number of touches he gets makes him a solid No. 2 hack.

GREG JENNINGS. WR. Packers. His TDs dipped slightly last season (to nine from 12), but he posted career highs in receptions (80), targets (140), receiving yards (1,292) and yards per game (80.8).

MARQUES COLSTON. WR, Saints. He missed five games last year with a thumb injury and had microfracture knee surgery during the offseason. But when he's healthy, Colston is one of the league's best wide receivers.

JOSEPH ADDAI, RB, Colts. He has shown an inability to stay healthy, so expect him to share the workload with rookie Donald Brown. Maybe a little rest will help Addai get more touches in the long run.

TONY ROMO, QB, Cowboys. Don't worry about the loss of T.O. Romo still has plenty of talented receivers and is backed up by a dangerous running game.

RONNIE BROWN, RB, Dolphins. He should be able to take on a heavier workload now that he's more than a year removed from ACL surgery. Look for Brown to be a bargain No. 2 back.

AARON RODGERS, OB, Packers. His first year as a starter was a success on the stat sheet, with Rodgers throwing for 4,038 yards and 28 touchdowns. He even added four rushing TDs to

RODDY WHITE. WR. Falcons. He averaged 85.5 receptions, 1,292 yards and 6.5 touchdowns over the past two seasons. He won't sneak up on fantasy owners anymore and is ready to be considered a No. 1 receiver.

TERRELLOWENS, WR, Bills. He wore out his welcome in Dallas, and questions follow Owens to Buffalo: Can he be an elite fantasy receiver at 35 and in a Trent Edwards-led offense?

ANQUAN BOLDIN, WR, Cardinals. He is an injury risk and carries some off-field baggage, but when Boldin is between the lines, he provides top-notch fantasy value at a less than elite price.

PHILIP RIVERS, QB, Chargers. With LaDainian Tomlinson battling injuries last season, Rivers stepped up to carry San Diego's offense. But if L.T. is healthy, look for a slight downtick in Rivers' stats.

BRANDON MARSHALL, WR. Broncos. There's no doubting Marshall's talent, but he's a risk/reward player thanks to the switch to Kyle Orton at quarterback, off-field issues and offseason hip surgery.

T.J. HOUSHMANDZADEH, WR. Seahawks.

Houshmandzadeh's numbers with Seattle should be similar to the ones he posted with the Bengals. He'll be a nice No. 2 fantasy receiver as long as Matt Hasselbeck is healthy.

DWAYNE BOWE. WR, Chiefs. Tony Gonzalez is gone, so the spotlight in Kansas City's passing game shines on Bowe. On a team that figures to be trailing often, he should get enough receptions to be your No. 2 wideout.

JASON WITTEN, TE, Cowboys. Without Terrell Owens to come between them. Witten and Tony Romo should thrive as a combination. If Witten can get in the end zone more this year, even better.

KURT WARNER, OB, Cardinals. The fountain of youth never tasted so good. As long as Warner is still standing and throwing the ball to Larry Fitzgerald and Co., he can carry your fantasy team.

DARREN McFADDEN, RB, Raiders. He is the best (only?) game-breaker in Oakland, so expect a heavy workload in the rushing and passing games. McFadden is an excellent sleeper.

WES WELKER, WR, Patriots. He is Mr. Consistency, with six or more receptions in all but two games last season. Welker has extra value in point-per-reception leagues, especially with Tom Brady back.

TONY GONZALEZ, TE, Falcons. His move from Kansas City to Atlanta makes him a bit of a risk, but working with Matt Ryan and Roddy White should lead to another shot at a 1,000-yard season.

ANTONIO GATES, TE, Chargers. He had five-year lows in yards, receptions and TDs last season but still ranked in the top seven among tight ends in

each category. He's a bargain this

THOMAS JONES, 46 RB, Jets. He is sure to come down from a career-high 15 touchdowns, but the Jets will still lean on Jones while Mark Sanchez gets his feet under him.

ROY WILLIAMS, WR, Cowboys. He gets a chance to redeem himself in his first full season with Dallas after last year's debacle. Somebody has to catch all those passes now that Terrell Owens is gone. They can't all go to Jason Witten, can they?

BERNARD BERRIAN WR, Vikings. He averaged 20.1 yards per reception in 2008, tops among receivers with 40 or more catches. His big-play ability will lead to some big days as your No. 2 wideout.

WILLIE PARKER, RB, Steelers. He is likely to lose some touches to Rashard Mendenhall, but the Steelers' strong running attack can support two fantasy backs.

DERRICK WARD, RB, Buccaneers. He averaged 5.1 yards per carry in three years as a backup with the Giants. He's the lead back now, but his status as a flex play hasn't changed.

VINCENT JACKSON, WR, Chargers. Last season, this big-and-tall playmaker needed only 59 catches to rack up 1,098 receiving yards and seven TDs. but he's a character risk.

TIP FROM A PRO

Bengals QB CARSON PALMER says ...

Steal my unsung running back.

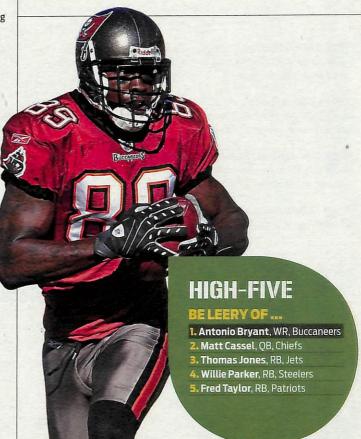
Cedric Benson is going to have a great year. He's a guy you wouldn't really think about. First, you think about L.T. and Adrian Peterson. You can steal Cedric. I'd take him a lot higher than what he's being projected as. The way he runs the ball, I can't wait to watch.

CHAD JOHNSON, WR, Bengals. "Ochocinco" accomplished more off the field this offseason (name change, Twitter) than he did on it in 2008 (540 receiving yards, four TDs). At 31, Johnson is a high-risk buy.

JONATHAN STEWART, RB, Panthers. He is more powerful at the goal line than teammate DeAngelo Williams. Those chances for touchdowns make Stewart a nice flex back.

HINES WARD, WR, Steelers. He has seven touchdowns in each of the past two seasons. At age 33, think 1,000 receiving yards and another seven scores.

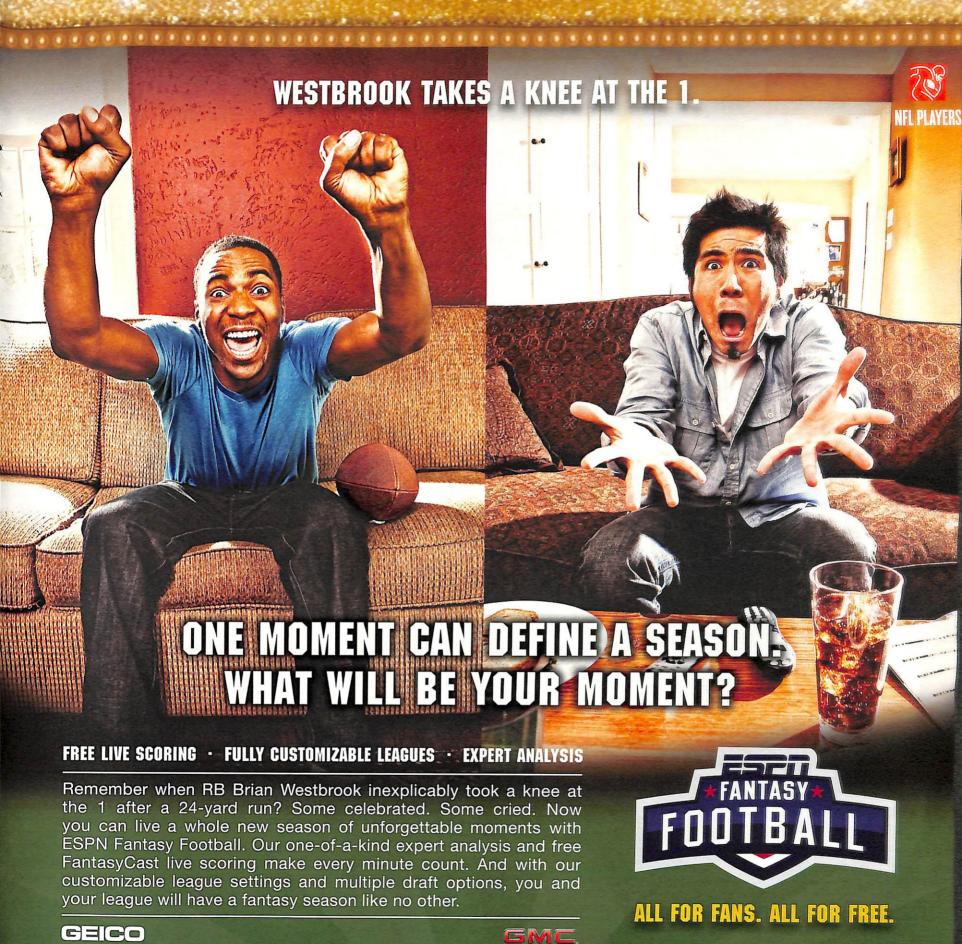
BRAYLON EDWARDS, WR, Browns. Will he be the 16-TD stud from '07 or the can't-catch-a-thing clown from '08? Probably something in between. Edwards is a good fit as a No. 3 fantasy wideout, but keep an eye on his injury status during training camp.



TIP FROM A PRO

Giants RB BRANDON JACOBS says ... Two words: Larry Fitzgerald.

He's productive. He's got sure hands. He runs great routes. He's a team player. He does everything he's supposed to do—never in the paper, none of that stuff. He's going to be out there every game, and (the Cardinals) love to throw the ball.



SIGN UP NOW AT ESPN.COM/FANTASY

MARSHAWN LYNCH, RB, Bills. Were he not facing a three-game suspension, Lynch would be a potential first-round pick. He has the rushing and receiving skills to carry any fantasy

LARRY JOHNSON. 58 RB. Chiefs. He has been on his best behavior this offseason, and that's saying something. Johnson also has little competition for carries. Believe it or not, he's a bargain.

JAY CUTLER. QB, Bears. His fantasy value takes a hit with his move to Chicago, where he trades Brandon Marshall and Eddie Royal for a stable of unproven receivers. Cutler is a

Inw-end No. 1 OB.

MATT SCHAUB, QB, Texans. The undisputed Offseason Fantasy Darling, Schaub averaged 320.3 passing yards in Houston's final four games last season. He passed for more than 250 yards in eight of 11 starts, but can he stay healthy?

DONOVAN McNABB, **OB**, Eagles. After getting benched against the Ravens in Week 12. McNabb had 14 touchdown passes and just five interceptions in eight games (including playoffs). He still has it, and he plays in a pass-first offense.



Broncos WR EDDIE ROYAL says ... Do your homework on rookies.



There's a lot of them out there that can surprise you. Do your research. You've got to pay attention to what kind of offense they're in, if they're in a run-first offense or a spread offense. All those little things are going to help you out. don't know how many people had me on their teams that first game last year.

SANTONIO HOLMES, WR, Steelers. A Super Bowl MVP performance masked a disappointing regular season for this deep threat, but expect Holmes to hit 1,000 receiving yards and be more consistent in his fourth season.

LEE EVANS, WR, Bills. The addition of Terrell Owens means fewer passes will be thrown his way, but it also means more favorable coverage. Expect more of the same—he had 1,017 receiving yards and three TDs last season—as a result.

ANTONIO BRYANT, WR, Buccaneers. He enjoyed a better-late-thannever breakout year in '08 with 1,248 receiving yards and seven TDs. However, he won't approach those numbers again given the overhaul in Tampa Bay.

LENDALE WHITE, RB, Titans. With Chris Johnson running most of the time in Tennessee, White is reliant on goal-line carries. That's enough for him to be a borderline No. 2 fantasy back.

CHRIS WELLS, RB, Cardinals. Beanie could start, but his inability to stay healthy in college—and in camp—is a concern. So is the possibility Tim Hightower could steal goal-line carries.

DALLAS CLARK, TE. Colts, His TDs dropped, but his receptions, yards and targets were up last season. A happy medium would be 750 yards and eight TDs. Clark is the last elite tight end on the board.

GREG OLSEN, TE, Bears. He is quickly moving up draft boards as news comes out that he could become the focal point of the Bears' Jay Cutler-led passing offense.

ANTHONY GONZALEZ, WR, Colts. He inherits Marvin Harrison's spot in Peyton Manning's progressions, which means a third-year breakout season is in the works.

CHRIS COOLEY, TE. Redskins. He scored just once last year, but Cooley is as consistent as they come with four straight seasons of more than 730 receiving yards. Expect his TDs to go back up in '09.

DESEAN JACKSON,

WR, Eagles. Rookie Jeremy Maclin will steal some touches (especially on returns), but Jackson will build on his impressive rookie season and look to become a true No. 1 wideout for the Eagles.

SANTANA MOSS, WR, Redskins. He emerged as a go-to target in Jim Zorn's West Coast scheme and is a strong bet to hit 1,000 receiving yards and six TDs.

CEDRIC BENSON, RB, Bengals. He averaged 103 rushing vards in Cincinnati's last four games and is the team's undisputed workhorse. Benson is an underrated bench option.

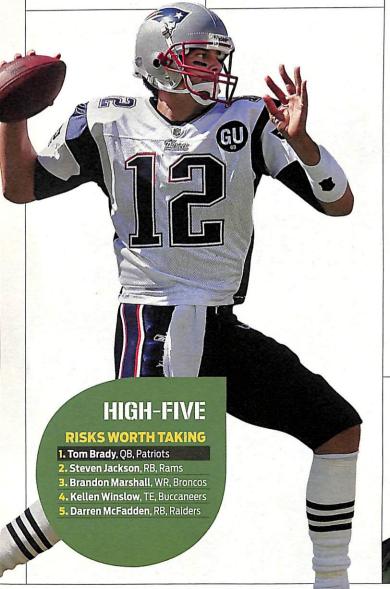
REGGIE BUSH. RB. Saints. Kim Kardashian wasn't the problem. It was the injuries. Bush has missed 10 games the past two seasons and is coming off microfracture surgery. He's still a top play in receptions leagues.

OWEN DANIELS, TE, Texans. Despite his lack of TDs (just five the past two years), Daniels is one of the best receiving tight ends in the NFL. Expect more from him this season.

EDDIE ROYAL, WR, Broncos. He caught 91 passes for 980 yards and five TDs as a rookie. Royal will serve as Denver's version of Wes Welker.

CARSON PALMER, QB, Bengals. If his elbow stays intact, Palmer could become a fantasy factor again. He has the tools to do it, and he's a potential bargain this late.

JULIUS JONES, RB, Seahawks. He will get carries, but there's no guarantee



TIP FROM A PRO

Packers LB NICK BARNETT says ... Go with proven players.

Don't draft any of the new free agents who are playing on new teams. I wouldn't risk anything on intuition. Go with players with sure chemistry in schemes that are proven.

Jones will produce. He has scored just four TDs in the past two years, and both of his TDs last season came before Week 4.

LANCE MOORE, WR, Saints. Is he a one-year wonder or a steady possession receiver? It's tempting to say the former, but in the Saints' high-powered offense, Moore can continue to be productive.

FELIX JONES, RB, Cowboys. He was averaging 8.9 yards per carry before a toe injury prematurely ended his rookie season. Jones is a threat to go the distance every time he touches the ball.

KEVIN WALTER, WR, Texans. Walter has turned in back-to-back 800-yard receiving seasons and plays in an explosive offense. Consistency will be an issue, but he has shown the ability to be a productive No. 3 fantasy wideout.

MATT RYAN, QB, Falcons. Can Ryan avoid the sophomore slump? With Tony Gonzalez in town and a year of experience under his belt. Ryan could become a top five quarterback by the end of the season.

TORRY HOLT, WR, Jaguars. Despite being 33 and coming off a down year, Holt still has great hands and route-running ability. He'll be David Garrard's go-to guy, which should translate into quality numbers.

JERRICHO COTCHERY, WR, Jets. New York's QB situation will be 84 shaky, but that was true back in '07 when Cotchery had 1,130 yards. He's not a "must-have" sleeper like last year, but he's still solid.

TIP FROM A PRO

Chargers CB QUENTIN JAMMER says ...

Grab a marquee wideout.

This is a receiver year. If you're going to draft somebody first, it's got to be a receiver. The NFL has gotten away from pounding the ball, running the ball a lot. It's a passing league.

TIP FROM A PRO

Eagles S QUINTIN MIKELL says ... **Draft Maurice Jones-Drew.**

> He does a lot—catches passes, runs the ball, does returns. He's a stout guy, so he doesn't get injured a lot. He's a good player with touchdown production.





See a Different Game

Get superior sports coverage in the palm of your hand. Sporting News Today, the country's first and only daily digital sports newspaper, is now optimized for your mobile phone.*

- Delivered via the internet every morning, 7 days a week
- Breaking sports stories plus news about every team, every game and every major score from coast-to-coast
- More than 200 reporters and contributors nationwide
- Guest columns from athletes, coaches and industry executives
- High-energy and easy to navigate

Sign up now! It's free! *3G full html web browser phones & pdas



FANTASY FOOTBALL PREVIEW

RAY RICE. RB, Ravens. Expect good things from Rice in his second season, especially in the receiving game. He likely won't get goal-line carries, but will produce yards as long as he stays healthy.

BEN ROETHLISBERGER, OB. Steelers. He had 15 interceptions with his 17 touchdown passes last year and has taken 139 sacks in the past three seasons. Big Ben is a big injury risk.

JEREMY SHOCKEY, TE, Saints. He failed to score a touchdown in the Saints' high-powered offense last season, but he will change that this year if he finally stays healthy.

KELLEN WINSLOW, TE, Buccaneers. A tight end can be a young quarterback's best friend, Mr. Freeman, meet Mr. Winslow.

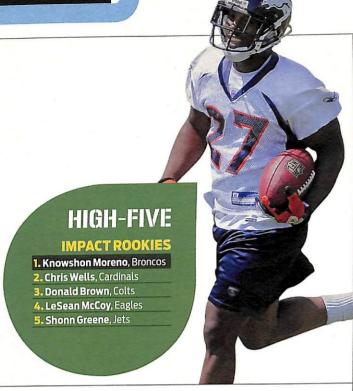
DONALD DRIVER, WR, Packers. He is 34, but he has been good for 1,000 receiving vards each of the past five seasons. That won't change. Driver is a reliable No. 3 fantasy wideout.

FRED JACKSON, RB, Bills. Marshawn Lynch's three-game suspension will give Jackson plenty of touches at the start of the season. If he performs well, Jackson will continue stealing playing time the rest of the way.

JAMALLEWIS, RB, Browns. He will turn 30 this month, and he tiptoed to 1,002 rushing yards last season. Don't count on him for No. 2 running back production; make him the first or second back off your bench.

LAVERANUES COLES, WR, Bengals. He is only 31, so don't write him off yet. If Carson Palmer stays healthy, Coles can have a nice year opposite Chad Johnson.

MICHAEL CRABTREE, WR, 49ers. He's a rookie with a shaky quarterback situation, but Crabtree is supremely talented and will be San Francisco's No. 1 receiving option the moment he steps onto the field.



DERRICK MASON, WR, Ravens. Mason has topped 1,000 yards receiving in seven of the past eight seasons and, after deciding not to retire, will again be Joe Flacco's No. 1 target.

DONNIE AVERY, WR, Rams. He showed flashes of brilliance during his rookie year, and with Torry Holt gone, who else are the Rams going to throw to (besides the other team, of course)?

SAMMY MORRIS, RB, Patriots. The Pats' running back situation is always tough to figure out, but Morris has been a steady contributor when healthy the past two years. He's a reliable flex back.

DEVIN HESTER, WR. Bears. He made great strides as a receiver last year, and he should only get better with another year of experience and Jay Cutler throwing to him.

FRED TAYLOR, RB, Patriots. If he can carve out a decent role in New England, the touchdowns could follow. The Patriots figure to be high-scoring with Tom Brady back in business.

TED GINN, WR, Dolphins. The multi-talented Ginn is entering his third season, which is commonly known in fantasy circles as a potential breakout year.

JOHN CARLSON, TE, Seahawks. He was a steadying influence in an offense that had a slew of injuries during his rookie season. Expect continued improvement now that Matt Hasselbeck is back.

TIP FROM A PRO

Seahawks QB MATT HASSELBECK says ... Don't forget about Brady.



Tom Brady is probably a man on a mission. He probably finds people's lack of faith disturbing, and he's going to do something about it.

TIP FROM A PRO

Redskins WR ANTWAAN RANDLE EL says ... Remember the L.T. of 2007.

> It's hard to go wrong with LaDainian Tomlinson. Draft him because he gets it done. Because he had a tough year last year, he will push himself that much more to be prepared for the season. It's not like he's on the down. He had an injury.

101. Steve Breaston, WR, Cardinals

102. Eli Manning, QB, Giants

103. Steelers defense

104. Tim Hightower, RB, Cardinals

105. Le'Ron McClain, RB, Ravens

106, Donald Brown, RB, Colts

107. Giants defense

108. Kyle Orton, QB, Broncos

109. Darren Sproles, RB, Chargers

110. Matt Cassel, OB, Chiefs

111. Domenik Hixon, WR, Giants

112. Muhsin Muhammad, WR, Panthers

113. Chester Taylor, RB, Vikings

114. Earnest Graham, RB, Buccaneers

115. Willis McGahee, RB, Ravens

116. Eagles defense

117. Ravens defense

118. Ahmad Bradshaw, RB, Giants

119. Vikings defense

120. Rashard Mendenhall, RB, Steelers

121. Michael Jenkins, WR, Falcons

122. Matt Hasselbeck, QB, Seahawks

123. LeSean McCoy, RB, Eagles

124. Visanthe Shiancoe, TE, Vikings

125. David Garrard, QB, Jaguars

126, Chris Chambers, WR, Chargers

127. Deion Branch, WR, Seahawks

128. Zach Miller, TE, Raiders

129. Joe Flacco, QB, Ravens

130. Jerious Norwood, RB, Falcons

131. Shonn Greene, RB, Jets

132. Justin Gage, WR, Titans

133. Cowboys defense

134. Titans defense 135. Bears defense

136, Trent Edwards, OB, Bills

137. Patrick Crayton, WR, Cowboys

138. T.J. Duckett, RB, Seahawks

139, Leon Washington, RB, Jets

140. Earl Bennett, WR. Bears

141. Dolphins defense

142. Patriots defense

143. Correll Buckhalter, RB, Broncos

144. Ricky Williams, RB, Dolphins

145. Jeremy Maclin, WR, Eagles

146. Percy Harvin, WR, Vikings

147. Miles Austin, WR, Cowboys

148. Anthony Fasano, TE, Dolphins

149. Jake Delhomme, QB, Panthers

150. Chargers defense

151. Kevin Faulk, RB, Patriots

152. Johnnie Lee Higgins, WR, Raiders

153. Jerome Harrison, RB, Browns

154. Justin Fargas, RB, Raiders

155. Chad Pennington, QB, Dolphins

156. Jamaal Charles, RB, Chiefs

157. Nate Washington, WR, Titans

158. Jets defense

159. Kevin Curtis, WR, Eagles

160, Tashard Choice, RB, Cowboys

161. Ladell Betts, RB, Redskins

162, Shaun Hill, QB, 49ers

163. Chris Henry, WR, Bengals

164. Davone Bess, WR, Dolphins

165. Isaac Bruce, WR, 49ers

166. Maurice Morris, RB, Lions

167. Mewelde Moore, RB, Steelers

168. Dominic Rhodes, RB, Bills

169. Greg Camarillo, WR, Dolphins

170. Cadillac Williams, RB, Buccaneers

171. Hakeem Nicks. WR. Giants

172. Brandon Jackson, RB, Packers

173. Glen Coffee, RB, 49ers

174. Jason Campbell, QB, Redskins

175. Sage Rosenfels, QB, Vikings

176. Steve Smith, WR, Giants

177. Mark Clayton, WR. Ravens

178. Sidney Rice, WR, Vikings

179. Bobby Engram, WR, Chiefs

180. Laurence Maroney, RB, Patriots

181. Mark Bradley, WR, Chiefs

182. Brady Quinn, QB, Browns

183. Marc Bulger, OB, Rams

184, Josh Morgan, WR, 49ers

185. Malcom Floyd, WR, Chargers

186. Kevin Boss, TE, Giants

187. Dustin Keller, TE, Jets

188. Redskins defense

189. Stephen Gostkowski, K, Patriots 190, David Akers, K, Eagles

191, Rob Bironas, K. Titans

192. Neil Rackers, K, Cardinals

193. Ryan Longwell, K, Vikings

194. Mason Crosby, K, Packers

195. Nick Folk, K, Cowboys

196. Nate Kaeding, K, Chargers

197. Jason Elam, K, Falcons

198. Matt Bryant, K, Buccaneers

199. Garrett Hartley, K, Saints

200. Robbie Gould, K. Bears



GET YOUR HEAD IN THE GAME WITH THE COMCAST HD TRIPLE PLAY

- Digital Cable with every game in HD
- High-Speed Internet to track stats online
- Unlimited Nationwide Calling for trash-talking after a win

Plus get

\$200 CASH BACK

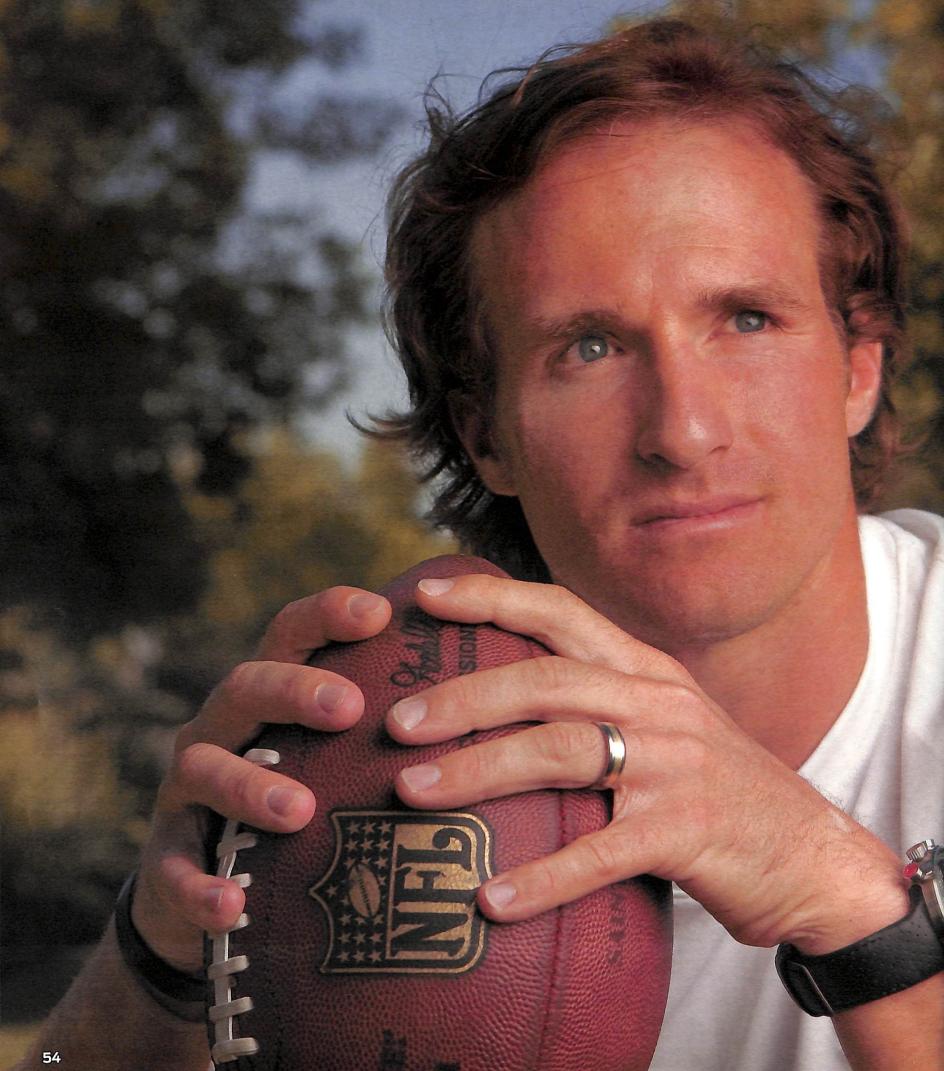
for your fantasy league fees.

Call **1.877.950.7950** to sign up today.

And raise your game at FANTASYREALITYCHECK.COM.



Offer ends 9/1/09 and is limited to new residential customers with a subscription to the Comcast HD Plus Triple Play package or higher. Term contract and early termination fee apply. May not be combined with other offers. Cash back requires activation of service within 30 days and maintenance of account in good standing for 90 days. Gift check may take up to 16 weeks for delivery. Not available to Comcast employees or their family members. Call for restrictions and complete details. Comcast © 2009. All rights reserved. All trademarks are the property of their respective owners.



BIGGEST, NOT THE STRONGEST, but SIVOOTH

Sporting News Conversation:

Drew Brees

The Saints' 5,000-yard quarterback knows he isn't mentioned in the same breath as Peyton Manning or Tom Brady, but even without the physical tools, he has plenty of accomplishments to talk about

Photos by K.C. Alfred for SN

n the great outdoors of San Diego in late July, Drew Brees looked right at home. And this was a couple of days *after* he'd had several inches of surfer dude hair cut off. "The longest it's ever been, too," the 30-year-old recounted with a grimace. "It was awesome."

Brees was back in his original NFL hometown to lend his ongoing efforts to the league's Play 60 exercise initiative, which he joined in 2007, his second year with the Saints. (Play 60 is a cousin of the Take a Player to School campaign, for which Brees

is national spokesman.) New Orleans has been—what's the word?—"awesome," Brees said, "from the first day."

That may be true of the quarterback's personal experience there—most notably his performance on the field, to which his 2008 NFL offensive player of the year award attests. But the Saints have followed their 2006 run to the NFC championship game with back-to-back bummer seasons. Overlooking a rocky canyon on a picturesque day, Brees discussed that and more with *Sporting News*' Steve Greenberg.

Drew Brees

SN: You've been pretty deeply involved for a couple of years now with programs that encourage children to be more active. Why is this issue so important?

BREES: We have the highest rate of childhood obesity we've ever had in the United States. The whole point of Play 60 is for kids to get out 60 minutes a day and exercise, whether they're playing sports or going for a bike ride or just running around with their friends. That accomplishes a lot of things. You develop some great social skills by being with friends and doing different things than you usually do, and that's extremely important for a kid. Also, it's a great opportunity to spend time with family, whether you're out in the yard playing catch with your dad or your uncle or your grandpaw, or wrestling around with your brother. That was me as a kid. Those are some of my best memories.

SN: Have you ever been overweight?

BREES: No. But it's funny because if you look at what is considered the ideal weight for somebody who's 6-0 like me, it's, like, 175. I'm 218. Would you say I'm overweight?

SN: Everybody knows quarterbacks are perfect.

BREES: (Laughs.) It's a little bit different when you're talking about an athlete.



JUST ONE OUESTION

For Bobby Hebert. former Saints quarterback and lifelong Louisianan:

Where does Drew Brees rate among the Saints' all-time

'To me, it's a no-brainer—Drew Brees is the greatest quarterback the Saints have ever had. He is right up there with Tom Brady and Peyton Manning. If he stays healthy and wins a Super Bowl, he'll be a Hall of Famer. He's only 30. If he can stay healthy a few more years, maybe he'll have the numbers for the Hall whether he wins a championship or not. He's that good, that accurate. You just don't see that with a lot of quarterbacks."

- Steve Greenberg



SN: You're an NFL man of the vear award winner, due in large part to your efforts in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Is that when you became community-oriented?

BREES: We established our foundation back in 2003 here in San Diego, ... My wife has had a few people in her family die of cancer, so cancer research is important to us. When we first established the foundation, it was very much geared toward that. We helped fund a lot of camps for kids with terminal illnesses or serious illnesses. And then when we got to New Orleans, we broadened the scope of our foundation because obviously, with the rebuilding effort, there was so much work to be done. Since 2003 until now, we've raised or committed over \$4.5 million through our foundation in San Diego, New Orleans and the greater West Lafayette (Ind.) community. There's so much left to accomplish, but we're really proud of what we've done. You're a role model whether you like it or not. You need to accept that, although some guys embrace it more than others.

SN: You still have a season to go before you'll have started as many games in New Orleans as you did in San Diego. Which phase of your career has been better?

BREES: If you just look at the statistics, you'd probably say the



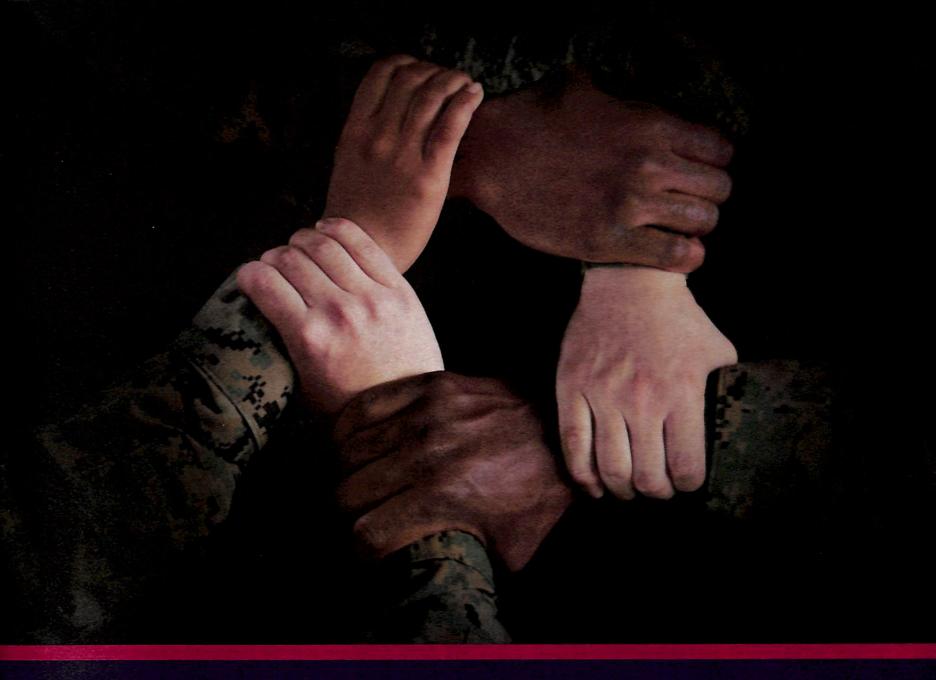
success in New Orleans has been better. But then again, I learned some valuable lessons at San Diego that allowed me to have the opportunity to have the success we've had at New Orleans. I didn't start any games as a rookie. My second year, I started the whole season. My third year, I got benched three times, started 11 games. The fourth year we come out 12-4, win the division, go to the playoffs and then have another winning season the next year. ... But my experience in New Orleans has been just unbelievable. Who would have ever thought with the condition of the city, team and organization that we would be where we are now? We have a special group of guys, a great coach, great owner, great general manager and a great fan base. We've got some unbelievable fans who just love the city, love the Saints; you could

Brees worked with Habitat for Humanity (top) to help rebuild New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. He also has made four USO tour visits, this one with (from left) Giants defensive end Osi Umenyiora, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell and former Marshall football coach Jack Lengyel in 2008.

lose every game, but if they see you out there fighting, they're going to love you. There's something to be said for that. We play for the fans. We play for the people. New Orleans is a special place.

SN: You were the league's offensive player of the year in 2008. Was that your best

BREES: I think all the way through, just consistently, I felt like I was playing some of my best football.



YOUR CLOSEST BROTHERS AND SISTERS MAY NOT BE THE ONES YOU GREW UP WITH.

When you were growing up, you always felt you were different from the other kids around the neighborhood. You were popular, but you never ran with the wrong crowd. You kept your head in the books and your eye on the future. As a U.S. Marine, you'll meet young men and women just like you. And after 12 weeks of rigorous training, guaranteed to put your honor, courage and commitment to the test, you'll discover you're not so different after all. You'll experience a sense of belonging you've never felt before. And become part of a family that will have your back for life.

For more information, visit us online at MARINEOFFICER.COM, or call 1-800-MARINES.



Drew Brees

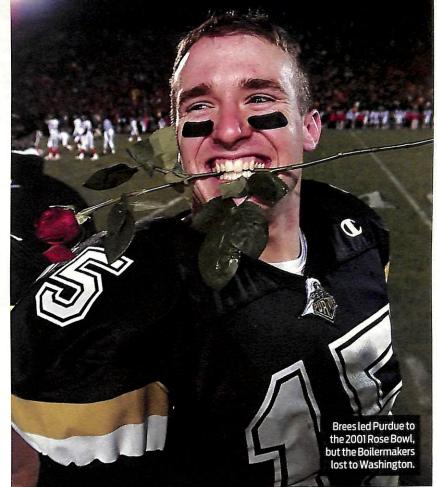
Every year, I should feel that way-'09 should be better than '08. I always want to get better, and deep down I know that I have done everything this offseason to put myself in position to have the best year of my career, not only individually but as a team. To me, nothing is going to be satisfying unless I'm holding up the Lombardi Trophy at the end of the year. That's the great thing about our sport and the tough thing about our sport: There's only one team that walks away happy at the end of the year. For everybody else, it's an empty feeling.

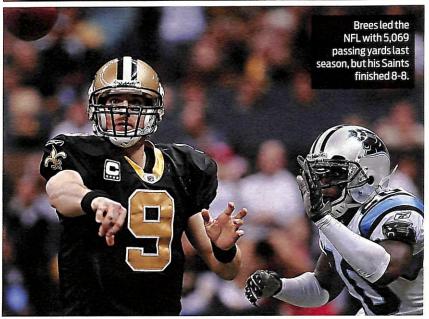
SN: Why weren't the 2008 Saints good enough to make the playoffs?

BREES: If you look at the eight games that we lost, five of those eight were by three points or less. So go figure. That's two missed field goals; that's the offense not being able to finish when we needed to finish; that's the defense not getting that stop. It's everybody. Each phase of the game-offense, defense, special teams-just needed one more play. One more play! I look back and scratch my head because we were that close. It's hard to swallow.

SN: You finished the season 15 yards short of Dan Marino's single-season record of 5,084 passing yards. How badly did you want that record? And do you still have the best chance of anyone to break it?

BREES: Would I like to be the guy who does it? Sure. What's crazy about that whole situation is obviously we had a chance to break it at the end. I might have been the only person in the entire Superdome who had no idea where I was in regard to that record. We needed 402 vards (to break it) at the beginning of the game. You don't just go into a game and say, "Hey, I'm going to throw for 400 today." It doesn't work like that, especially when you're playing one of the top teams in the NFC, Carolina. They were fighting for the division title. ... The fact is, would I love to have that record? Yes, for the simple reason that I know how much it would have meant to everybody on our team. When you go through a season like we did, the ups and downs, the heartbreak, you still want to have something to be able to hang your hat on in the end. If you have that record, that links you together forever.





SN: You won a 5A title as a high schooler in Austin, Texas-the top division in a football-mad state. Has anything in the game been that good since?

BREES: No. That was really cool. You have to play six games in the playoffs. We were 16-0! We basically played an NFL season. Who does that? But that's the way Texas does it, and I love it. I remember everybody on that team. That links us together forever. I still see them now, and we reminisce on those days.

SN: At Purdue, there was a Rose Bowl loss and a couple of top five finishes in the Heisman Trophy race. You've played for an NFC title and been to Pro Bowls, but you're still below the Manning-Brady-Favre cut line in terms of perception. Do you ever feel like the proverbial bridesmaid?

BREES: I don't necessarily look at it that way. I've been part of some pretty special teams. But certainly now, at this level, it's all about winning the

championship. Forget the individual accolades. All that's nice because it shows that people respect what you're trying to do, but in the end you want to walk away from this game being called a champion, with the Super Bowl ring, especially as a quarterback because that's how you're measured.

SN: Are you good enough to take the Saints all the way to a championship? And are the Saints good enough to get you there?

BREES: Absolutely on both. You go into every year saying you never know when it's going to be your year. Would anybody have said Arizona was going to play in the Super Bowl last year? You just don't know. But we have put ourselves in a position, with the moves we've made this offseason and with the mindset we have and our experiences the past couple of years, that this is our time. We have a stretch here, a small window. This is our time, and we need to make sure we make the most of it.

SN: Who are the three best players on the Saints?

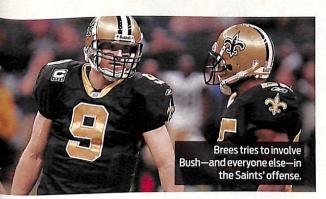
BREES: You know what? I'm going to say Will Smith, Jon Stinchcomb and ... (long pause) Jonathan Vilma.

SN: Two linemen and a linebacker-that might surprise some people. The Saints seem to be one of those teams whose interior players aren't appreciated nationally.

BREES: Just because you are the most talented player, or maybe you are a very productive player, that's a small part of the equation as to your importance to the team. I factored in leadership and the respect that those guys garner from guys on the team.

SN: If you were coaching the offense, how would you use Reggie Bush?

BREES: There's a lot of ways to use him, but in the end, just like with any guy-you want to put him in the best position to succeed. With Reggie, when he has the ball in space, he can do some phenomenal things. So, find a way to get him his touches where he's in positions where he's most comfortable making plays. That'll be in the backfield at times; that'll be throwing him screens, splitting him out, putting him in the slot, returning punts. He's versatile. But move him around and try to create some matchups for him, and make sure defenses know they have to have a plan for Reggie Bush to be everywhere on the field.



SN: Do the Saints need to keep pecking away in the passing game with Bush as much as they have the past few years, or might it be better for the offense if he had fewer catches?

BREES: The more you touch the ball, the more comfortable you feel, the more you're in the game. But we have a lot of guys we're trying to get the ball to. There's going to be those games where he has 10, maybe 12, catches and a bunch of other runs. Maybe he's breaking 100 yards rushing a game or two. But for the most part, it's not until we get into the game and find out who's hot, and we're going to feed that guy. I see us walking out of a majority of games where Pierre Thomas got his hard yards, Reggie got his touches, Marques Colston made his plays, Lance Moore made his plays, we hit Devery Henderson on a big one, we hit Robert Meachem on a big one, Jeremy Shockey got his plays, Billy Miller got his plays. These are guys I've got confidence in. We've put in a lot of time together. We're on the same page.

SN: Who's the best quarterback in the game today?

BREES: It's a no-brainer that it's Brady and Manning at the top.

SN: Is one better than the other?

BREES: There are some things that Tom does better than Peyton and certain things that Peyton does better than Tom. But there really isn't a chink in the armor for either one of them. They're both extremely talented guys, but so much of the game with those two is in

JUST ONE QUESTION



For Philip Rivers, Brees' replacement as the Chargers' quarterback:

Has Brees played better than you thought he would when he left for **New Orleans?**

"I knew he had a shoulder injury that was going to be a tough injury to overcome, but if

somebody could do it, it was going to be Drew. So the level at which Drew has played and continues to play is not surprising at all. He is a true professional and plays the game the way it is supposed to be played. One thing I really appreciated was the relationship with Drew here my first two years and what I learned from him about pushing myself and competing."

- Steve Greenberg

their heads, just the level of focus and intensity and confidence, the leadership ability, the it factor. And when you look at their records, you can't argue with it.

SN: How about your all-time favorite?

BREES: I've always been a big Joe Montana fan. Our physical attributes are similar: not the biggest, not the strongest, but smooth, you know? Also, Troy Aikman, I grew up in Texas, so watching the Cowboys in the early '90s, man, that was the best. Those were great years.

SN: You were the Division I-A Academic All-American player of the year in 2000. You have seemingly half the food allergies known to man. What else don't people know about you?

BREES: I love to travel. I love to play golf. I'm really a sports junkie. You say to me, "Hey, let's go bowling." OK. "Hey, let's go play croquet." OK. "Hey, let's go play beach volleyball." OK. Those are all sports, or at least leisure activities, but you don't just play to play them, you play to win, right? ... I love supporting the military. I've been on four USO trips. I've been to Kuwait twice, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Afghanistan, Japan and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Both of my grandfathers were in the military during World War II. ... Also, my wife and I just had our first baby this offseason, a 6-month-old little boy named Baylen. He was born on my birthday.

SN: Has fatherhood been what you expected?

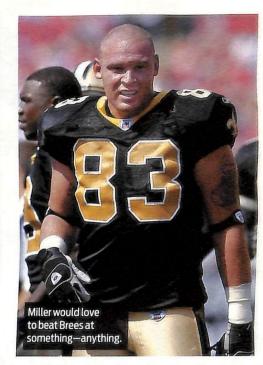
BREES: Oh, man, it's a learning experience. You can read all the books you want, but until it actually happens, you don't know. For example, my little man has been able to roll over onto his back for a couple of months, but he refuses to roll from back to front. We've been trying to coach him up. What he'll do is flip over in bed at night, but he's not a back sleeper so he'll wake up and be startled or he'll start playing for a while then start crying. So you want to teach him to roll back over and go back to sleep. The other day, he rolled back-to-front for the first time, and I was like, "Yes!" It was such a big feeling of accomplishment; I was so proud of him. I have a journal I'm writing, a book of firsts, for the little man. "Today, you rolled over for the first time." Or, "Today, we fed you rice cereal for the first time." And then I tell the story.

SN: Does the off-field behavior of your NFL colleagues concern you, on the whole?

BREES: Here's the thing. I think there are so many more guys who do good things, but they aren't talked about. There are a handful who have made bad decisions, but that's where all the attention goes.

SN: If you weren't a football player, what would you be doing with your life?

BREES: There are a lot of things I'd want to do. I'd probably want to be on the PGA Tour. I'm serious about that. I might try to get really, really good at golf for a while. I've thought about potentially coaching. I definitely want to stay involved with sports—that might be coaching the little man's tee ball team-and then we'll definitely continue to do our foundation work. I feel like we can really make a difference there.



You don't know Drew Brees like I know Drew Brees

By Billy Miller, Saints tight end

I've found out the hard way that Drew is a phenomenal athlete. I remember the two of us going out to play H-O-R-S-E during a USO trip to Japan. I'm looking at this 6-0 quarterback and thinking, I'm about to kill this guy. All of the sudden, he's shooting the lights out and beating me three games to zero. Same trip, we're about to play racquetball and I'm thinking, I've got the reach, the arms, the power. Minutes later, I'm down three games to zero and I'm dying, and Drew hasn't broken a sweat. There is something out there that I know I can dominate this guy in, but I haven't found it yet.

Drew will tell you about how, when he was a young buck in Austin, Texas, he played Andy Roddick in tennis and beat him something like four out of five times. Now, they were little kids and Drew was a few years older than Roddick, but is Drew proud of that story? Unbelievably. He gets so passionate when he talks about his exploits in sports other than football. To hear him tell it, football is probably his worst sport.

You want to know how competitive Drew is? You should hear him talk about his son. The boy is, what, 6 months old? But if you ask Drew, he's already reading the newspaper, walking and shooting baskets. Drew has the most advanced son of all time. I think I'm going to go back to school and get my law degree and try to be this kid's agent.

On a serious note, I've never seen anyone give back as much as Drew. The things he does for the city of New Orleans and the way he supports the military are unbelievable. The USO trips I've gone on with Drew have been life-changing events for me; I can't thank him enough for bringing me into that. I'm kind of like his bodyguard because nobody really knows or cares that I'm there, but they're so pumped to see Drew. He does a phenomenal job of just being one of the guys, thanking the troops and showing support for what they do.

- As told to Steve Greenberg

CHAMPING ATTHEBIT

SIX MONTHS AFTER WINNING THE SUPER BOWL, THE STEELERS ARE EAGER TO GET BACK TO THE WORK OF WINNING ANOTHER. SN JOINED THEM FOR A WEEK AT SAINT VINCENT COLLEGE IN LATROBE, PA., AS THEY OPENED TRAINING CAMP.

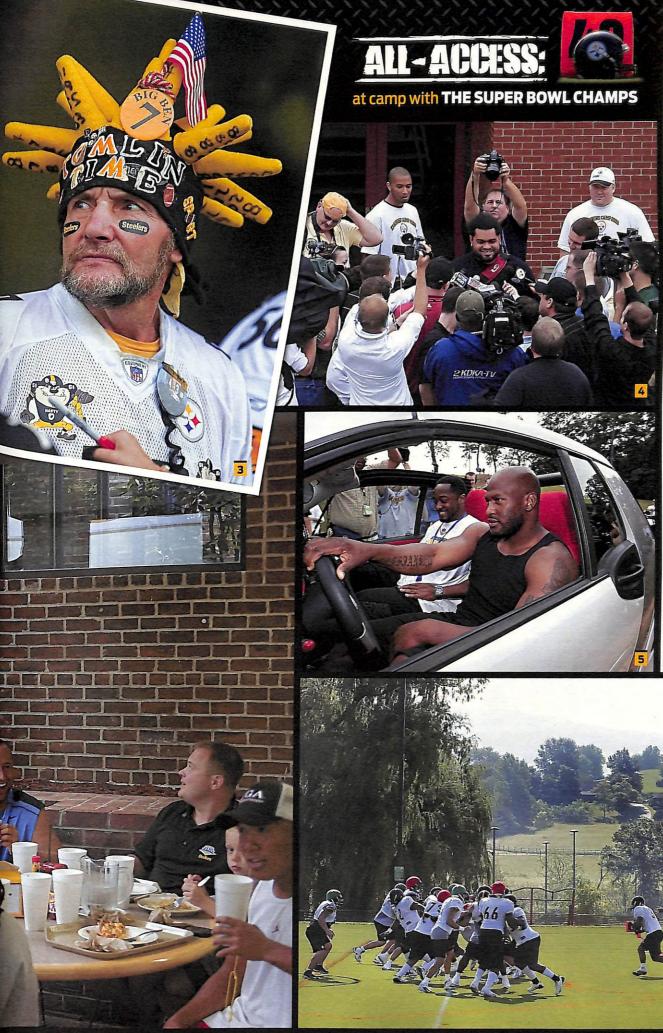
Photos by Bob Leverone / SN





SUMMER HOME OF THE PITTSBURGH STEELERS

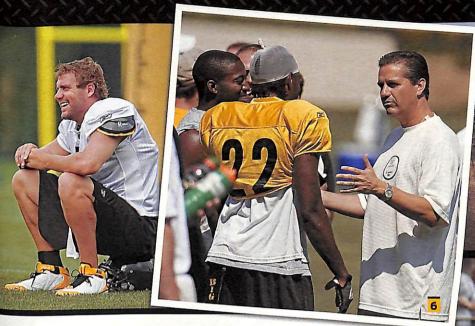




- Rookie hazing is light at Steelers camp, but one tradition the veterans aren't willing to give up when the mood strikes is forcing rookies to sing for their dinner. Running back Isaac Redman was one of several to take to the table and belt out whatever was on his mindfight songs weren't required—when the vets called for a solo by tapping spoons on dishes. Most of the singing was pretty bad, but word is first-round pick Evander Hood did a stirring rendition of "My Girl."
- The Steelers aren't the only thing Latrobe has going for it. The city is the birthplace of Arnold Palmer, Fred Rogers (that's Mr. Rogers to you) and the banana split. Iron City beer also flows from the burg 40 miles southeast of Pittsburgh.
- Roughly 15,000 fans showed up for the first day of camp. Some, like Don Gala, were a little more ready for the start of a new season than others. Two fans-neither of whom was Don Gala—even tried to jump to the front of the line for the 1:30 p.m. opening of the gates by hiding out in portable toilets adjacent to the field for 41/2 hours. They were busted by security and sent to the back of the line after potty-to-potty chatter revealed their position.
- Being a Super Bowl champion brings a little extra attention. There were almost as many reporters as citizens in Latrobe, which has a population of about 9,000. OK, there are only 21 media types surrounding Chris Kemoeatu, but that's an awful lot for an offensive lineman, isn't it?
- 5 Linebacker James Harrison didn't exactly arrive at camp in style, but he gets points for going green. Teammates—and coach Mike Tomlin, who just had to test out the leg room for himself-gave Harrison a hard time when they saw his 242 pounds stuffed behind the wheel of a Smart Car, a ride seemingly more fit for a punter. Harrison's response to anyone who would listen? "I'm holding it for a friend!"
- Saint Vincent College offers a country setting for Steelers players and fans. Quarterback Ben Roethlisberger ran through plays with the offense with willows weeping away within throwing distance.







and punters? Well, there's always the long snapper. On the first night of camp, kicker Jeff Reed (middle) and punter Daniel Sepulveda (right) brought along Greg Warren on a trip to Wal-Mart for snacks and dorm room necessities.

B Players are treated to an almost endless supply and variety of food at every meal. Eighty hungry Steelers got their choice of beef, turkey or bison burgers.

9 Harrison (left) got a chance to hold Polamalu's 9-month-old son, Paisios, after practice. Few family members attend practice, but Paisios and his mom, Theodora, were regulars.

10 A veteran of 12 training camps with the Steelers, wide receiver Hines Ward plays to the fans as much as anyone on the team. He turned a local photographer's camera at the crowd for some fun during an afternoon practice.



HOCKEY HOCKEY

- ► TOP 60 FANTASY PLAYERS
- NCAA PREVIEW
- ▶ 30 BREAKOUT CANDIDATES
- ▶ 124 PAGES OF TEAM PREVIEWS
- **▶ 30 ENFORCERS TO FEAR**
- **SN INSIDER LOWDOWN**

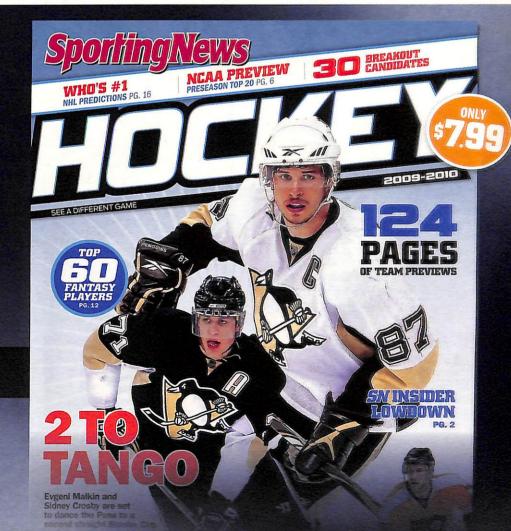
ON SALE SEPTEMBER 1

1-800-380-7404

www.sportingnews.com or www.streetandsmiths.com

SHIPPING: + \$3.50 for the first magazine + 50¢ each additional magazine

Sporting Lavis
YEARBOOKS











BIRTHPLACE OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

ON SEPTEMBER 3,1895, 300 YARDS SOUTHEAST OF THIS SPOT, JOHN K. BRALLIER, QUARTERBACK, WAS PAID \$10.00 AND EXPENSES FOR LEADING THE LATROBE YMCA TEAM TO A 6-O WIN OVER JEANNETTE. THIS PAYMENT IS RECOGNIZED BY THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE AS THE BEGINNING OF THE PROFESSIONAL GRIDIRON SPORT.

INCLUDED ON THE ROSTER OF SUBSEQUENT LATROBE PROFESSIONAL TEAMS WERE THE FOLLOWING FOOTBALL GREATS:

CHARLES SHOEMAKER ED ABBATTICHIO ALEX LAIRD GEORGE AUKERMAN CHARLES MCDYRE JOHN SCHMIDT
DEACON BRANT WALTER OKESON "DOGGIE"TRENCHERD GEORGE FLICKINGER HARRY (CAP) RYAN EDDIE WOOD JACK GASS MARCUS SAXMAN FIELDING YOST DEDICATED DOTOBER 28, 1960



133



KYLE BUSCH

HAS PLENTY OF TALENT, BUT IT'S HIS ON-AND OFF-TRACK BRAVADO THAT MAKES HIM THE DRIVER FANS LOVE TO HATE

By Matt Crossman

Photo by Alan Marler for SN

he star of the Kyle Busch Show is smirking.
Always smirking. He struts out on stage during introductions before NASCAR's All-Star race, every stitch of his driver's suit oozing confidence. The crowd acknowledges him, with boos, with cheers, with words unrepeatable.

This is a fan-centered event and therefore requires even more Busch cockiness than normal—and his normal is a lot. He looks over the crowd, as if surveying what he has created. And it is good. With his crew members and crew chief by his side, Kyle Busch bows dramatically, doffs his cap and blows the crowd—the booing crowd, the crowd that hates him—a big kiss.

This pleases some fans and enrages more, which is precisely the point. His work here done, Busch bounds off the stage to his racecar.

Then the show really begins.

o understand why Busch, 24, drives otherwise normal NASCAR fans batty, start with this: He is young, cocky, mouthy, aggressive and sublimely, uniquely talented. In other words, he is

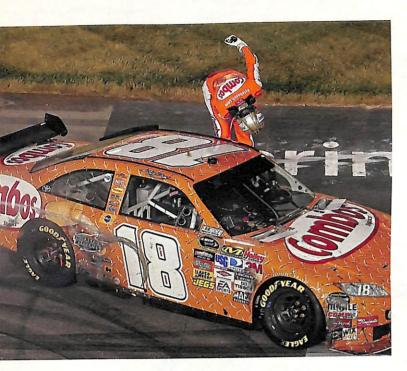
every NASCAR fan's dream driver, and they hate him for it.

When Busch broke into the Cup Series in 2005, he ran into everybody once and the hot dog vendor twice. Now, it has been weeks since he hit the hot dog vendor (and no, it's not because the hot dog vendor is outrunning him). He still fights the urge to make every pass, win every lap. And this is (allegedly) the newer (not really) more patient (only there's little evidence) Busch.

"I've calmed down a lot," he says. "I used to always do it. Every time. And it got me in a lot of wrecks. Now it's more calculated. Sometimes you don't have to make that

It makes you wonder—considering he's still the sport's most aggressive driver—what move is he thinking about making that he isn't? The Chase starts in a month, and Busch has spent too much of the season on the bubble. His luck hasn't been great, his cars have been weak, and some critics have blamed his overaggressive driving for exacerbating his struggles. "You've got to find (the edge), and you play around with it sometimes," he says. "Rarely do I ever stay under it."





Busch's signature victory lane bow is generally received with more boos than cheers, but it's all part of the performance.

What makes Busch so fun to watch is that edge that he rarely stays under is already further out there than everybody else's. "His abilities open up some possibilities other drivers just don't have," says Alan Gustafson, Busch's crew chief from 2005-07, his first three Cup seasons. "He drives so hard for so long, his out of control becomes controllable."

he star of the Kyle Busch Show is signing autographs in downtown Charlotte. Don't be fooled by the boos, the middle fingers, the startling profanity. Busch is not universally hated. Largely, yes, but not universally. There is evidence that being bad is the new good: His merchandise sales have increased in the three-digit percent

range-the exact number depends on who's counting-in the past two seasons. "They're not buying our stuff to burn it," says Jeff Dickerson, Busch's spotter and agent. "But if they are, that's good, too."

Busch would probably be a bigger seller, but it's simply not cool for a fan to wear his stuff. "Dale Ir. fans all the time come up to me and say, 'Hey, you're my favorite driver.' And they're wearing Dale Jr. stuff," Busch says. "It's like, 'It looks like you went to the wrong souvenir trailer."

here really is no Kyle Busch Show. but he makes so much news that race broadcasts might as well adopt the name. He has struggled for most of the summer, which has kept him in the news, as have his temper, unwillingness to be interviewed and tendency to spout off when he does talk to reporters-all of which he has acknowledged as problems, which is not the same as fixing them. Jimmie Johnson and Jeff Gordon and their ilk have managed to make close-quartered racing at 180 mph (yawn), being rich and famous (getting sleepy) and marrying gorgeous models (zzzz) seem vanilla. Busch is a 22-gallon tank full of hot sauce.

The star of the Kyle Busch Show has a growing list of offenses against mankind that include smashing a guitar trophy after winning a Nationwide race, leaving the track when he thought his car was totaled and it turned out it wasn't, being the first driver to win at the Cup level in a Toyota, wrecking at Daytona in July with the checkered flag in sight and not being thankful about it, winning too many races, not wiping that look off of his face, etc.

NASCAR has had dozens of villains but few who relish the role as Busch does. He was booed at his first Nationwide Series race because his older brother, Kurt, the 2004 Cup champion, was already a villain. Kyle decided quickly he couldn't win fans over so he might as well annoy them. "Kyle embraces it," says Doug Fritz, president of Richmond International Raceway. "He also seems to enjoy it. It's great for the fans. The fans love it. If every driver was the same and had the same personality, the sport wouldn't be as good as it is today."

Busch encourages boos, taunts fans and constantly needles the sport's hero, Dale Jr. It takes either enormous courage or enormous stupidity to give Superman a wedgie, but Busch does it.

xperts come to no consensus when asked what makes the star of the Kyle Busch Show a great driver.

Car control, says seven-time Cup champion Richard Petty.

Speed, says Kasey Kahne, driver of the No. 9 Dodge.

Determination, says Clint Bowyer, driver of the No. 33 Chevy.

Aggressiveness, says Carl Edwards, driver of the No. 99 Ford.

Restarts and raw speed early in runs, says Denny Hamlin, Busch's teammate at Joe Gibbs Racing.

Processing information incredibly quickly, says Gustafson.

Knowing what the car needs to go fast, says Busch's current crew chief, Steve Addington.

All those skills are fine and dandy. But Busch is the talk of NASCAR because he runs his mouth as well as he runs his car. Virgin ears ought not to listen to his radio transmissions, and a thin-skinned crew chief would be left a whimpering mess.

Busch gets in nearly as much trouble for

BUSCH HAS THE LOOK OF GIBBS' NEXT CHAMPION

Joe Gibbs won three Super Bowls with three different quarterbacks. As owner of a Sprint Cup team, he has won three championships with two drivers and two manufacturers (Bobby Labonte in a Pontiac, Tony Stewart in a Pontiac and Chevrolet.) Experts in the sport believe it's only a matter of time before Kyle Busch's Toyota gives Gibbs a third title-winning driver



Busch (left) has had his struggles this season, but with Gibbs as his boss, they can't last long.

and manufacturer. Winning with three drivers is not unprecedented, but winning with three drivers and three manufacturers is. The men who have won championships for Gibbs explain his success:



Joe Theismann, winning quarterback in Super Bowl 17: "We're the lucky ones who got to work with him. One of Joe's great quotes: He doesn't like wet diapers. He likes people with personality. He likes people who take chances. Here's the key with him: He allows you to be your own man. He doesn't try to saddle you."



Doug Williams, winning quarterback and MVP in Super Bowl 22: "I've always admired the fact that he knew which buttons to push, who to push them on. who needed to be motivated and the ones that didn't need to be motivated. Joe Gibbs is probably the best that I've seen as far as knowing the people that either worked with him or who worked for him."



Mark Rypien, winning quarterback and MVP in Super Bowl 26: "The one thing is you want to drive for him, you want to play for him. You know going in, all the small things, the things others might have overlooked, will be taken care of. He's also prepared to make adjustments on Sundays, which applies to both sports. He's one of the best in the game at being able to make adjustments."

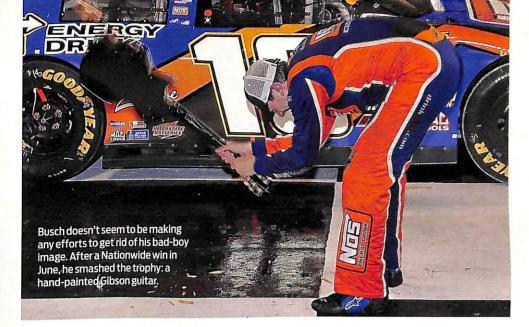


Bobby Labonte, 2000 Cup champion: "Joe's obviously a great motivator, great leader. People thrive on that. People pick up on that. He makes it work. He just has that background and that personality to make that happen."



Tony Stewart, 2002 and 2005 Cup champion: "Joe's strength is he knows how to assemble the right people to do the right jobs. He doesn't micromanage them. He's a great leader, but at the same time part of that is knowing how to get the right people there and letting them do their jobs.'

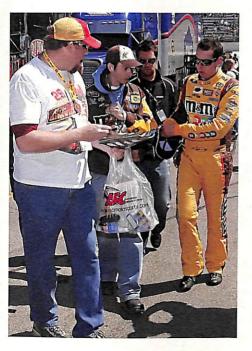
— Matt Crossman



what he doesn't say as for what he does. When he struggles-which lately has been frequently-Busch storms from his car, refusing to talk to reporters. The thinking is Busch should thank his sponsors and fans and humbly explain why he just lost the race, and all without smirking.

"If the sponsors wanted me to talk and mention their name-how many times do they need their name mentioned? They get it all day on TV, when you're leading the most laps," he says. "Even when it is a bad day, they get more time and more press coverage out of me leaving than of me sitting there talking about it because they'll only get 15 seconds of me talking about it, vs. the ultimate replays of it, over and over and over again. That's how I look at it. It's better for them."

M&M's-his primary sponsor-likes Busch's tank-full-of-hot sauce personality. "We knew Kyle was going to help move the needle," says Phil Grieco, who works for M&M's/Mars' sponsorship and sports marketing division.



Grieco credits M&M's relationship with Busch and his Joe Gibbs Racing team for doubledigit percent increases in sales in race markets. NASCAR fans hate Busch so much that they're eating more M&M's ... surely just to spite him.

his episode of the Kyle Busch Show had to be smuggled out of the editing room because it runs counter to Busch's villain persona. In August 2006, Busch visited St. John's Home for children near Grand Rapids, Mich. Soon after he started the Kyle Busch Foundation to help such facilities.

Those around Busch talk of being stunned at his transformation around children. "A lot of people see the brash kid. They don't realize the other stuff he's done," says Jeff Motley, a family friend and senior director of public relations for Las Vegas Motor Speedway. "It's almost like you see a completely different human being than the one with the sunglasses on walking around the garage like he's the king."

People close to Busch wonder whether fans would lighten up if they knew such details. Busch doubts it. "They don't care to know the good side of me," he says. "They've already got a mindset. It is what it is. It doesn't bother me."

he Kyle Busch Show frequently ends just like this one began—with a bow. It's Busch's race-winning celebration. He needs one now, as the postseason approaches, both for his confidence and to help secure his spot in the Chase.

"Before, when I would do a burnout, I would get out of the car and appear through the smoke, kind of like a magician in Vegas," he says. "Now, you still do the same thing, big smoky burnout, get out of the car, and once the smoke clears, you do a bow. It's sort of a thanks for coming out and supporting us. I gave a great performance today, so now you're all cheering for it, right?"

Busch does have a few fans, at least-and they're spending more and more money on his gear.

BUSCH IS THE NEXT...

When Kyle Busch causes a problem or wins a race-or does both in the same day—the NASCARati want to compare him to the Intimidator, Dale Earnhardt, But that's preposterous. Other than being villainous racecar drivers, they have nothing in common. There's nobody like Busch in NASCAR right now. But in other sports, there are plenty of guys to compare him to.



RANDY MOSS, Patriots wide receiver and owner of a NASCAR trucks team, says: ME. "He's a rebel, and I am too. A lot of people don't like him because he wins too much. I love watching Kyle Busch win. I really got a lot of respect for

him because a lot of people don't like him, but he's overcome that and goes out and grabs the checkered flag and bows to the fans."



JERRY GLANVILLE, Portland State football coach, former NFL head coach, former Nationwide and trucks series driver, says: DEION SANDERS. "He takes a bow when he wins. People used to ask me, 'How do you put up with Deion Sanders? He

dances when he scores.' I said, 'I hope he dances three times a game.' If I was coaching (Busch), I'd say, 'I hope you bow once a week.'



JOHNNY DAMON, Yankees left fielder and NASCAR fan, says: DUSTIN PEDROIA. "Both are guys who not only expect to win but expect to have a good time doing it."



BRAD DAUGHERTY, five-time NBA All-Star, ESPN NASCAR analyst and part owner of a NASCAR team. says: MICHAEL JORDAN. "I think you can compare Kyle to Michael Jordan in the early part of his career. He was unbelievably talented, passionate and driven but came

up short in the postseason ... and then once he won his first championship, he won multiple, and I think it's the same with Kyle Busch. He's putting together these unbelievable seasons but has come up short in the Chase. But I think once he gets over that hump, this guy could win a lot of championships."



FRANK BEAMER, Virginia Tech football coach and NASCAR fan, says: PETE CARROLL. "I don't think their personalities are the same, but both of them do things a little differently and they are both very, very good at what they do."

- Matt Crossman

ways Busch could bring on more hate



Janet Evanovich is a New York Times best-selling author who has set crime novels in the world of NASCAR (and is a big fan). She offers some things Kyle Busch could do to become an even bigger villain:

- 1. Wear a cape.
- 2. Call himself an evil name like the Buschinator or Buschitor.
- 3. Refer to his pit crew as his "henchmen" or "minions."
- 4. Leak information that says he uses Jedi mind tricks to win.
- 5. Use a catchphrase like "Beware the deadly sting of the
- mighty Buschinator!" 6. Open up a Facebook page
- and reject everyone who tries to be his friend.
- 7. Always talk in the third person: "The Buschinator fears no onel'
- 8. Tell people his car is fast because he fuels it with puppies, kittens and a couple of drops of pure evil.
- 9. Refer to his motorcoach in the drivers' lot as his "evil lair."
- 10. Moon people from his car window when he wins.
 - Matt Crossman

THE ROTATION

Roommate Confidential



Red Wings forward Jason Williams has played for four teams in the past three years, so he knows a thing or two about roommates. Somewhere between the guy who doesn't

talk and the one who parties all night is the rooommate who's a perfect fit, he says.

- > Best roommate: "I've had quite a few. One of the best would be (Blackhawks defenseman) Cam Barker. The reason I say him is because of our scheduling and our afternoon naps. I don't like to sleep long in the afternoon. I like to go over (to the rink) early and things like that. He was one of the better ones, where everything worked out."
- > Most awkward situation: "I roomed (last season at Columbus) with Raffi Torres (who once gave Williams a concussion). That was awkward because of the hit. ... I thought, Put me with anybody besides him because of the past but ended up rooming with him. It wasn't bad. It wasn't like I didn't like the guy, but it was awkward at first.'
- > Best kind of roommate: "A guy who you can get on the same page with, sleepingwise. I like to sleep with the TV on. Anybody who likes to sleep with the TV on would work well for me."

- Craig Custance

Does defense win championships? NHL teams are banking on it

By Craig Custance

ccustance@sportingnews.com

Mike Komisarek got a five-year deal for \$22.5 million. Chris Pronger's seven-year deal is worth \$35 million. Jay Bouwmeester? He'll pull in \$33.4 million over the course of his new five-year contract.

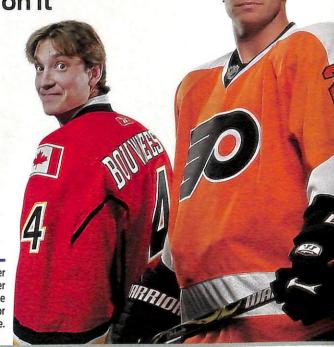
It has been a tough summer for many NHL players looking to cash in during a tight economy, but impact defensemen have thrived. Teams looking to improve their Stanley Cup chances spared no expense if it meant adding help on defense.

"Defense wins championships," Pronger says. "You're back there trying to stop the puck, and you're also the catalyst for the offense."

Which teams improved their blue line the most? Start with these five:

FLYERS. The moment Philadelphia general manager Paul Holmgren and Anaheim G.M. Bob Murray agreed on a draft-day blockbuster that sent Pronger to





Philly, the Flyers became serious Stanley Cup contenders. The deal shifted the balance of power in the Eastern Conference. "I think we have a better chance," Pronger says. "But we have to go out and play to the best of our abilities and push ourselves each and every day."

FLAMES. Few defenses can boast three high-end players like Calgary's Bouwmeester, Dion Phaneuf and Robyn Regehr. Not only did the addition of Bouwmeester give the Flames a franchise defenseman to build around, it could light a fire under the one they already had. "The Bouwmeester signing is going to motivate Dion Phaneuf like you won't believe," former NHL G.M. Doug MacLean says. "Bouwmeester got \$100,000 more (per season) than Phaneuf. You don't think that's going to motivate him?"

MAPLE LEAFS. Yes, there still is some question about who will score goals in Toronto, but a revamped blue line means goals won't come easily for opponents. That was G.M. Brian Burke's thinking when he added gritty defensemen Komisarek, Francois Beauchemin and Garnet Exelby this summer. "I think it's pretty exciting," Exelby

says. "(Burke) is bringing that pack mentality. We're going to have a good number of very tough, physical players. Just to have a team built around that, I think it makes everyone walk a bit taller."

LIGHTNING. Forward Steven Stamkos laughed when he tried counting the number of players who suited up for Tampa Bay's defense last season. "We went through like 22 or 23 defensemen," he says. "It was outrageous." Better health for Paul Ranger and Andrej Meszaros will help, but G.M. Brian Lawton did well to add Mattias Ohlund, Matt Walker, Kurtis Foster and Victor Hedman, the No. 2 overall pick in the 2009 draft.

KINGS. Nobody completely shuts down Alex Ovechkin. But Rob Scuderi earned a lot of praise during the playoffs for his strong play against Ovechkin and the Capitals. Scuderi's shot-blocking ability and sound defense helped the Penguins raise the Stanley Cup, which is why the Kings were willing to give him a four-year deal worth \$13.6 million. Adding Scuderi, along with another year of development for Drew Doughty and a healthy Jack Johnson, could mean a trip to the playoffs for the Kings.

BEHIND THE MASK

Marty Turco, Stars



Marty Turco prefers the word routine instead of superstition. Goalies are widely known for their idiosyncrasies, and he's no different. The same skate always gets laced first, and he tries to leave the dressing room at the same time for every home game.

- > Warmups: "My warmup is just as important as playing the game. I have to warm up properly, get stretched out numerous times by myself or trainers. ... Warmups are like clockwork; the guys always like to shoot on me in the same place. I could do warmups blindfolded if I knew who was
- > Padding up: "I go old school. I lay down on the ground with my pads, put my legs on the ground and put them on. Young goalies look at me and say, 'I'd never think of doing
- > On the road: "We pick a time to leave the room together (before games). We always leave with the second hand being on the 2 of the (countdown) clock-16:32 or 16:52. We determine it with (team captain) Brenden Morrow before the game."
- > Why the routine? "It leads to focus. At the end of the day, goaltending is about being sharp and in tune. Being high on routine is a prerequisite for being a nutty goalie."

- Craig Custance

A.L. EAST:

BASEBALL

QUESTIONS FOR THE STRETCH

BALTIMORE ORIOLES

What can the team's future stars learn while playing spoiler?

Beginning August 14, Baltimore will play 35 games against playoff contenders, including 11 against the Rays, six against the Yankees and five against the Red Sox. "Our young guys are definitely getting thrown into the fire," says 2B Brian Roberts. "But I think it does nothing but help. When you are playing in what most people consider the best division in baseball every day, you either learn to survive or you don't."

LF Nolan Reimold, a rookie of the year candidate, agrees. "The difference between us and the Yankees and Red Sox is that they are consistent teams, veteran teams, They've put everything together. And that's where we are looking to get." Baltimore, which hasn't had a winning year since 1997, is hoping its rebuilding phase is nearing an end.

- Chris Bahr

BOSTON RED SOX

Can the team count on 3B Mike Lowell's surgically repaired hip to hold up?

The acquisitions of 1B Casev Kotchman and C/1B Victor Martinez before the nonwaiver trading deadline illustrated Boston's concern. Martinez caught slightly more than half the time this season with Cleveland, but he's more valuable to the Red Sox at first base. With Martinez there, Kevin Youkilis can slide over to third in place of Lowell.

"It's clear that (Lowell is) really grinding. It's clear that he's still able to put together good at-bats. But it's also clear that he's more limited running the bases now and so forth than he will be when he recovers fully," says Boston general manager Theo Epstein. "When Mike gets a little bit of rest, he benefits from it, and he's fresher, and we get a better player."

- Matt Crossman

NEW YORK YANKEES

Is Phil Hughes ready for the pressure of a pennant race?

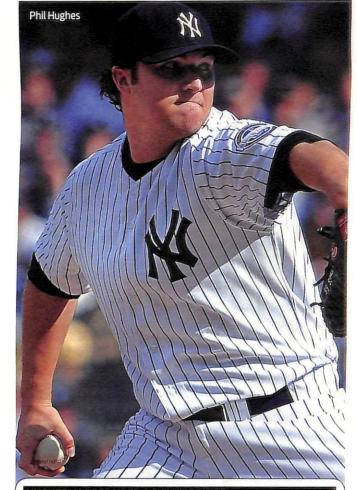
With New York in desperate need of an eighth-inning bridge to closer Mariano Rivera, the team turned to Hughes, a highly touted rotation prospect. Much like Joba Chamberlain before him, Hughes has thrived in a relief role after posting a 5.45 ERA in seven starts. Count Chamberlain among those impressed by Hughes' transition. "It's not as easy as he's made it look," Chamberlain says. "He's throwing everything he wants for a strike whenever he wants."

Hughes has been so impressive in relief that the Yankees resisted the urge to reinsert him into the rotation when righthander Chien-Ming Wang suffered a season-ending shoulder

If Hughes, a 23-year-old righthander, is nervous about the stretch run, he is hiding it well. "I'm confident I can handle it," he says. "The same guys are hitting against me. There are no superheroes suddenly showing up in August and September that I'm aware of."

Even the most dominant postseason pitcher in major league history isn't concerned. "He has what it takes. He's been successful now for a good period of time, so I don't see why he wouldn't be ready," Rivera says.

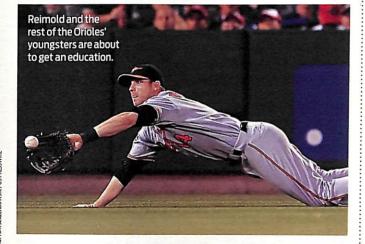
- Chris Bahr



HUGHES HAS REPAIRED A SHAKY BRIDGE

Phil Hughes' relief stats compared with those of the four other pitchers the Yankees have used most in the eighth inning this season:

	IP	ERA	K
Hughes	31	1.45	40
Brian Bruney	66	6.14	60
Damaso Marte Brett Tomko			
Edwar Ramirez			



TAMPA BAY RAYS

Is the team in trouble without a proven closer?

Thus far, the lack of experience in the ninth inning hasn't been a big issue. J.P. Howell, the versatile lefthander who looks more like a skinny second baseman than a burly closer, became the team's best ninth-inning option after veterans Troy Percival (shoulder) and Jason Isringhausen (elbow) suffered season-ending injuries.

"I think the most important part of the J.P. Howell package is he's

not afraid of that moment; he really embraces that," Rays pitching coach Jim Hickey says. "That, and the combination of his three really good pitches and the really good command makes him a really successful closer-or as I'll call it, the ninth-inning pitcher."

Howell had three career saves before this season, but he is 4-1 and 10-for-10 in save opportunities since June 13 (the date of Isringhausen's final appearance).

- Ryan Fagan

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

Is the success of the young starting pitchers a sign of things to come-or just false hope?



By Pat Hentgen, the Blue Jays' 1996 Cy Young award winner

They've had some younger pitchers really step up this year. First guy who comes to mind is Ricky Romero, It's been unfortunate with the injuries they've had with Dustin McGowan, Shaun Marcum and Jesse Litsch.

But I think, overall, they've got

a lot of depth at that position, which is very rare. Dane Johnson running the minor league pitching has done a nice job really pounding some of the basic fundamental issues into these guys' heads. And pitching coach Brad Arnsberg has done a real good job with them once they get to Toronto. It's pretty promising.

As told to Ken Bradley



QUESTIONS FOR THE STRETCH

CHICAGO WHITE SOX

If his sore foot holds up, how much of an impact will Carlos Quentin make in the team's playoff push?

Plantar fasciitis is tricky, but Ouentin is back in the White Sox's lineup and beginning to shake off the rust from his nearly two-month layoff, "If Carlos is healthy and playing every day, the White Sox win the division," says Ken Harrelson, the team's television play-by-play man and veteran of nine major league seasons, "That's how simple it is. He's the best hitter on the team."

For the first five months of 2008, the White Sox's left fielder was arguably the best hitter in the A.L.—he had 36 homers and 100 RBIs by September 1. A broken wrist ended his season and sidelined him for the playoffs, but he will have an opportunity to atone for that with a strong stretch run in 2009.

- Ryan Fagan



CLEVELAND INDIANS

What happens now that Cliff Lee and Victor Martinez have been traded?

During the remainder of another disappointing season, executive VP and G.M. Mark Shapiro will focus on evaluation and development. There is talent in the Indians' system-OFs Trevor Crowe and Matt LaPorta will prove they belong in the majors—and Shapiro believes they can compete for the division title next year. With Lee and Martinez, though, they would have been among the favorites. So why deal them? "We just looked at the alternative," Shapiro says, "which was to bring the core back next year with no supplementation-and that was made clear to us by ownership—as well as probably making some smaller strategic cuts." When he found value for them on the trade market, Shapiro decided to focus on the future.

- Ryan Fagan



KANSAS CITY ROYALS

Will Zack Greinke win the A.L. Cy Young award?

As the Royals have plunged in the standings, Greinke's chances at the award might have fallen, too. His performance hasn't dropped more than a tick, however. "I told everybody early on that he wasn't going to keep this up all season," says former 20-game winner Mike Boddicker, now a Kansas City radio analyst. "If he could come close to maintaining, it would be amazing—and he has done that."

......

Greinke, who's 11-7, still leads the A.L. in ERA (2.43), has allowed just seven home runs in 1591/3 innings and continues to deliver quality starts. "He's pitched good enough to deserve it, but he's not getting the wins," Boddicker says. "He should have 15 or 16 wins, but he hasn't had the run support and he's seen his bullpen blow too many leads."

......

- Stan McNeal

MINNESOTA TWINS

What's behind the struggles of Francisco Liriano?



By Bert Blyleven, former Twins ace He's had high pitch

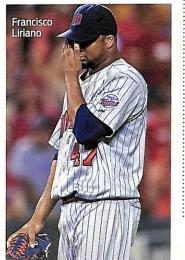
counts because of the lack of control of his fastball. He's always

had a very violent delivery; he falls off toward third base. I think his control comes and goes throughout the ballgame. He'll paint the outer half of the plate, and then he'll struggle with it. His slider is still an effective

pitch. But it's a strikeout pitch; it's not a pitch he can throw at 2-1 or 3-1. His changeup is a good pitch, but it has an inconsistent release point.

Today's pitchers are afraid to attack the strike zone. Liriano is afraid to throw strikes-every pitch has to be on the corner. That's not how you should go about business. He's still young. He's learning.

- As told to Matt Crossman



DETROIT TIGERS

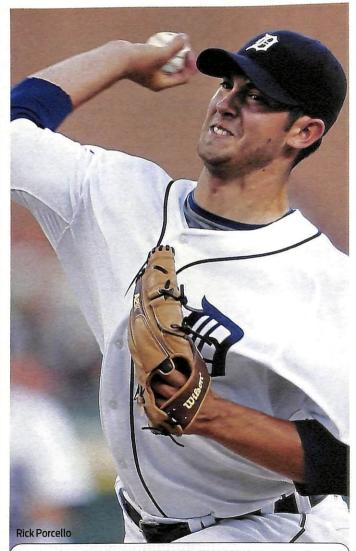
Will young starters Edwin Jackson (8-5) and Rick Porcello (10-7) keep it up and help the team to the playoffs?



By Todd Jones. former Tigers closer For Jackson, this is his time. He is ready to join the

elite. He will do so without much trouble because his stuff simply is too good and too electric. He can get in his groove and dominate. Porcello's road will be difficult based on innings alone. He is a 20-year-old who has never pitched this long without a break, and although the Tigers plan to limit his innings, he will go well beyond any previous plateau. Not to mention the stress that goes with even one big league inning.

One thing in Porcello's favor: Manager Jim Leyland is the best at looking for breaks. He used the All-Star break to get Porcello a 16-day rest between starts. Rick could make it through this season, but the concern is the untold damage his arm could suffer if he logs a lot of innings. Do you dance with the devil, or do you consider his future value and shut him down? The best-case scenario for Detroit would be to move Porcello to the bullpen. Protect his future and let the veterans carry the Tigers to the finish.



PORCELLO MUST PROVE HE CANGO THE DISTANCE

Rookie Rick Porcello surprisingly won a rotation spot with a strong spring training, but fatigue could be a factor down the stretch. His month-bymonth stats:

April: 1-3, 6.23 ERA (four starts, 213/3 innings) May: 5-0, 1.50 ERA (five starts, 30 innings)

June: 2-2, 4.60 ERA (six starts, 311/3 innings)

July: 1-2, 8.79 ERA (three starts, 141/3 innings)

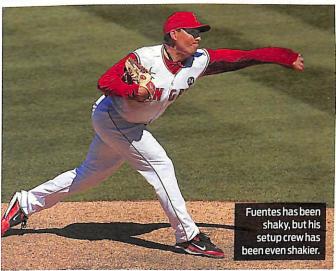
August: 1-0, 1.98 ERA (two starts, 132/3 innings)

A.L. WEST:

QUESTIONS FOR THE STRETCH

LOS ANGELES ANGELS

Does the team have a reliable enough bridge to closer **Brian Fuentes?**



The Angels lead the majors in runs scored since June, a surprise considering their most dangerous hitters, CF Torii Hunter and DH Vladimir Guerrero, missed a lot of time because of injuries. Los Angeles has needed every one of those runs, too.

The bullpen, usually among the league's best, has a 4.80 ERA-27th in the majors. Scot Shields struggled before knee surgery ended his season, and last year's rookie sensation, Jose Arredondo, was

When Rangers president Nolan Ryan talks

season, and they have responded. A season after

innings pitched and next to last in ERA, they have

improved to middle of the pack in both categories,

As the Texas heat bears down in September,

however, maintaining their strength will become

says Wilson, in his fifth summer in Arlington. "You

Beating the heat requires more than a strong

tougher. "It's an attitude as much as anything,"

just have to say the heat's not going to get to you."

approach, though, "Getting enough sleep is key,"

he says, and so is pacing yourself. "When you play

you usually do," Wilson says.

catch to warm up, maybe you don't throw as hard as

- Stan McNeal

and Kevin Millwood, Scott Feldman and RP C.J.

Wilson are having much better seasons.

pitching, his staff listens. Ryan said he wanted

his starters to work deeper into games this

Rangers starters finished last in the majors in

Will the pitching hold up in the dog days of summer?

TEXASRANGERS

demoted to Class AAA in June before being called up again. The setup scuffles have left the club scrambling in the late innings. "It's no secret," C Mike Napoli says. "Last year, we got to the seventh inning and the game was pretty much over. This year, it's been mixed up. Hopefully, we can get on a more consistent basis." A saving grace: The Angels are tied for the major league lead in comeback victories with 35.

Stan McNeal

Kevin

Millwood

OAKLANDA'S

Can the young starters get enough valuable experience to make the team a winner next season?

The brief return to the win-now philosophy failed, so the A's future again lies with youth, specifically in the rotation.

Trevor Cahill (21), Brett Anderson (21) and Vin Mazzaro (22) made their major league debuts this season,

and Gio Gonzalez (23) and Dallas Braden (25) also have been regulars. Anderson flirted with a perfect game, Cahill beat the Rangers and Dodgers, and Mazzaro had quality starts in his first four outings. They have taken some lumps but have impressed pitching coach Curt Young with their ability to recover. "That is really a sign of maturity," Young says.

A franchise that once boasted

Mark Mulder, Tim Hudson and Barry Zito appears to have another fantastic foundation. "As far as a starting pitching staff, I think our ceiling is unlimited," Anderson says.

Cahill agrees, and he is setting the bar high. "Once we get through this season and start anew next year, hopefully we will be a World Series contender."

- Chris Bahr

Does the offense have enough firepower to support the much-



By Harold Reynolds, former Mariners All-Star second

MLB Network analyst

Key guys have been injured. Adrian Beltre, obviously. Mike Sweeney has been struggling, Ken Griffey has been down a little bit. They're in a transitional period, and G.M. Jack Zduriencik is trying to figure out what direction the Mariners are going in.

I don't think they believed they some long balls.

It'll be interesting to see whether it works. In the American League, you've got to bop. You don't have a lot of American League teams that bunt men over and rely on their pitching and defense to carry the load. That's more of a National League philosophy. But they've got to build their team according to their ballpark.

- As told to Matt Crossman

SEATTLE MARINERS

improved pitching?



baseman, current

were going to win this year, anyway. They won't be the Mariners who made the great run in the Kingdome. The firework days are over. Safeco Field is a big ballpark. They've got to pitch, and they've got to catch the ball. Their offense is going to have to be a mixture of speed and guys who put the ball in play. And hopefully Russell Branyan can hit

THE M'S ARE AN A.L. TEAM WITH N.L. BATS

Despite another solid season from RF Ichiro Suzuki and surprising contributions from 1B Russell Branyan, the Mariners still rank among the worst in the majors in several key offensive categories:

Runs scored: 436 (28th) Home runs: 103 (21st) On-base percentage: .317 (25th) Slugging percentage: .407 (23rd)

OPS: .718 (24th)

N.L. FAST:

QUESTIONS FOR THE STRETCH

ATLANTA BRAVES

Will there be enough offense to make a postseason push?

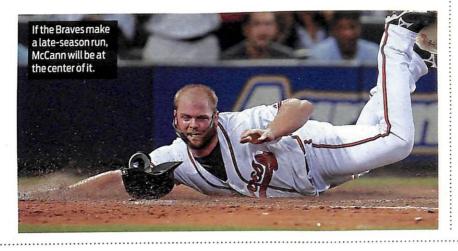
By Dale Murphy, a two-time N.L. MVP who played 15 seasons for Atlanta

they've been a great second half team the past few years.

I think so. I like a lot of things about that team. I like their young pitchers, and I think the defense is good. First half, they had offensive issues, but

The top of their lineup is better now with Nate McLouth up there, and I know Bobby Cox likes to score in different ways. That's important in Turner Field because it's not the launching pad of old. It's much more of a pitchers ballpark than Fulton County Stadium. And I love Brian McCann, He's come into his own, and he's already a four-time All-Star.

- As told to Ryan Fagan



FLORIDA MARLINS

Will poor plate discipline and defense cost the team a playoff spot?

The Marlins are tied for second in the majors in strikeouts and are 22nd in fielding percentage. However, first baseman Nick Johnson, a trading deadline acquisition, should help shore up both shortcomings.

"He brings something to the lineup that's been lacking, especially at the top of the order," says Andre Dawson, a former N.L. MVP and current Marlins special assistant. "He can get on base consistently in front of the 3-4-5 guys, and he's a veteran presence for the team. And he's strong defensively at first base."

Johnson, Florida's new No. 2 hitter, has a .420 on-base percentage; Emilio Bonifacio, who had been hitting second in the order, has a .299 OBP. The Marlins, who have a .331 team OBP (17th in the maiors), have to hope Johnson's influence runs deep.

- Ryan Fagan

NEW YORK METS

Many of the team's injured stars will return soon, but will it be too late to make a playoff run?



By Ron Swoboda, Mets outfielder, 1965-70

I'm a Mets fan, so I'm trying

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

Will Brad Lidge and the bullpen return to their 2008 form?

Philadelphia's bullpen was a driving force in last season's World Series title run; it ranked second in the majors with a 3.19 ERA. Brad Lidge was flawless as the closer, converting all 48 of his save chances in the regular season and postseason.

However, this season's relief corps is a middle-of-the-pack unit. and Lidge's ERA has swelled to 7.24.

"They've had a few guys on the disabled list and were without J.C. Romero," former Phillies outfielder Greg Luzinski says. "Hopefully, Lidge gets it back together, along with the entire bullpen, as guys come off the D.L."

The acquisition of lefthander Cliff Lee for the rotation also should help. "He will get them deeper in games and save the bullpen from throwing so many innings," Luzinski says.

.....

- Chris Bahr

WASHINGTON NATIONALS

How soon will Stephen Strasburg be ready?

Even before Strasburg had begun his junior season at San Diego State this year, his coach, Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn, knew he wasn't far from being ready for the majors. "He could have a solid year, possibly see himself-maybe, it depends on the organization—getting some big league time in September." Gwynn said.

But the Nationals, who drafted the righthander No. 1 overall in June, have to agree on a contract with Strasburg (and agent Scott Boras) by August 17. Washington ranks 27th in the majors with a 5.02 rotation ERA, so Strasburg, who went 13-1 with a 1.32 ERA and 195 strikeouts for San Diego State this season, could make an immediate impact. But the organization won't rush him.

- Ryan Fagan



not to let go of the rope. Nobody knows when Carlos Beltran and Carlos Delgado are going to be back. They're supposed to be close. When they come back, that doesn't fix their pitching. Once you get past Johan Santana, they've got nothing but question marks. They've got guys that can be anything on any given day. This is not the way we wanted the Mets to break that annoying string of losing their way out of the playoffs on the final day of the season. To be as rational as I can be about a situation I care about, a playoff charge would be incredible. But this looks like a bridge too far. - As told to Matt Crossman THE BATS THE METS SHELVED WERE BIG ONES The average season from 112 CF Carlos Beltran .278 34 113 2006-08 for 157 .292 16 69 118 66 SS Jose Reyes each of the Mets' injured star hitters: 1B Carlos Delgado 147 .265 33 105 85 2 SB AVG HR RBI 40 11 Beltran 62 .336 8 40 Their production 18 11 Reyes 36 .279 2 15 so far this Delgado 26 .298 4 23 15 n season:

注: 《三年》

N.L. CENTRAL:

QUESTIONS FOR THE STRETCH

CHICAGO CUBS

Will the bats stay hot now that the projected starting lineup is on the field?

The Cubs struggled to score for three months, but the team "never really had its starting lineup except for the first day of the season," club broadcaster and former third baseman Ron Santo says.

Now, though, bodies have healed, the bats have heated up, and the Cubs have climbed in the standings. Lately, 1B Derrek Lee has been the Lee of 2005, when he hit .335 with 46 homers, and LF Alfonso Soriano has gone on a hot streak. 3B Aramis Ramirez appears to have regained his stroke, although the effects of a shoulder injury are lingering.

"We're hitting as a team," Santo says. "When we left spring training, I felt this was the best ballclub we've had in my 20 years broadcasting. The division is for us to lose."

Stan McNeal

THE CUBS ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK, BUT THEY HAVE WORK TO DO

Injuries have been a factor, but so far, the 2009 Cubs haven't reached the bar set by the 2008 squad.

RUNS PER GAME

2008: 5.31 (2nd in the majors)

2009: 4.42 (21st)

BATTING AVERAGE

2008: .278 (5th)

2009: .251 (28th)

OPS

2008: .797 (3rd)

2009: .741 (20th)



CINCINNATI REDS

How much does Edinson Volquez's elbow surgery set back the rotation's future?



By Bill Bayasi, Reds VP of scouting, player development and international

operations

Tommy John surgery is not the end, so that's good with Edinson. A lot of pitchers have had the surgery and done well afterward.

Right now, we're looking at about 12 months maximum for his return, with the best case as little as nine months. So you're looking at possibly next May, June or July for his return. Right before Volquez's injury, he was really starting to get it.

Despite the injury, we still look at Volguez and Johnny Cueto as two young key components to our rotation.

- As told to Ken Bradley

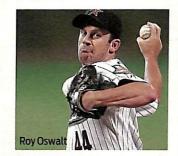
HOUSTON ASTROS

Will the team's traditional second half run fall short again because of the back end of the rotation?

.....

Houston entered June in last place but posted the division's best record (31-23) over June and July, thanks in large part to starters Wandy Rodriguez and Roy Oswalt.

The rest of the rotation, however, has struggled. Mike Hampton has a 5.30 ERA and Brian Moehler's is 5.23, and the fifth spot has been unsettled since Russ Ortiz was released. But manager Cecil Cooper doesn't want to hear his starters are overmatched when compared to the Cubs' and Cardinals'. "If I have a healthy Oswalt and Rodriguez throwing the way he's



been throwing, that's close (to the Cubs and Cardinals)," Cooper says. - Stan McNeal

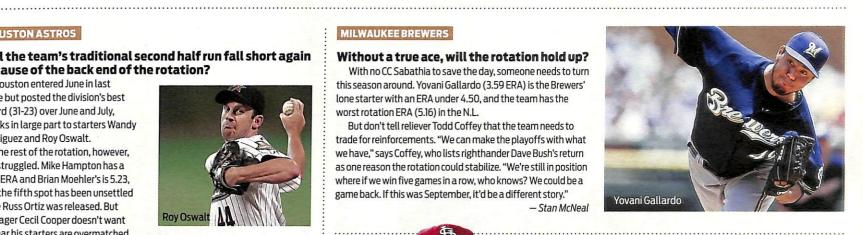
MILWAUKEE BREWERS

Without a true ace, will the rotation hold up?

With no CC Sabathia to save the day, someone needs to turn this season around. Yovani Gallardo (3.59 ERA) is the Brewers' lone starter with an ERA under 4.50, and the team has the worst rotation ERA (5.16) in the N.L.

But don't tell reliever Todd Coffey that the team needs to trade for reinforcements. "We can make the playoffs with what we have," says Coffey, who lists righthander Dave Bush's return as one reason the rotation could stabilize. "We're still in position where if we win five games in a row, who knows? We could be a game back. If this was September, it'd be a different story."

- Stan McNeal



PITTSBURGH PIRATES

Did the team take a step forward or backward when it traded away more veteran talent? By Kent Tekulve, who

had 158 saves in 12 seasons with Pittsburgh In less than two years

on the job, G.M. Neal Huntington has transformed the entire organization from one with very little talent in the minor league system to one with depth by trading virtually all of the

established major league talent for top prospects.

Thirteen of the current players on the major league roster and the majority of the top prospects at the Double-A and Triple-A level, plus a bunch of mid- to high-A-level pitchers. were acquired in those trades.

- As told to Ken Bradley

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

Can Ryan Franklin be a reliable closer?



Living up to his first half—he converted 21 of 22 save chances with an 0.79 ERA and made the All-Star team-will be a challenge for the 36-year-old righthander in his first season as a fulltime closer. Traditionally, Franklin's ERA has risen in the second half, but the Cardinals aren't concerned because Franklin hasn't been

overworked and still has strong command.

"He goes out there with the same mentality whether it's a save situation, tie, whatever," fellow reliever Jason Motte says. "It's ridiculous to say he won't do what he did in the first half. He goes out with the same approach every time, and that has paid off."

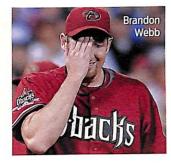
- Stan McNeal

N.L. WEST:

QUESTIONS FOR THE STRETCH

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

Should the team pick up its \$8.5 million option on **Brandon Webb for 2010?**



Webb lasted four innings on opening day before feeling discomfort in his pitching shoulder, which finally was operated on in early August. "It's been a long year for Brandon," Diamondbacks vice president and assistant general manager Peter Woodfork says. "He's had a lot of ups and downs, and went through all that rehab to try to get back this year, and came to where surgery was his final decision."

Arizona faces a difficult decision on Webb, the 2006 N.L. Cy Young award winner. The surgery was described as a "cleanup" procedure, which is encouraging. But the smallmarket Diamondbacks would be taking a big risk with the hope Webb will be ready by opening day.

COLORADO ROCKIES

Will Jason Marquis, Ubaldo Jimenez and Aaron Cook continue to pitch like aces?



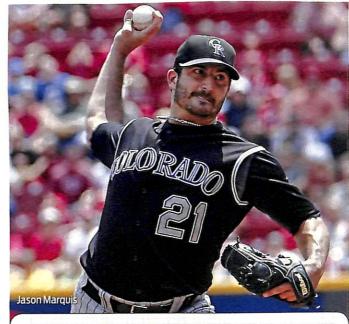
By George Frazier, 10-year major league pitcher and Rockies broadcaster

I think they can. The reason why is they're just pounding the strike zone. All three guys are contacttype pitchers. You don't see large strikeout totals from any of the

If you walk people in Coors Field, you're going to get beat. They're not walking people. They're throwing strikes and saying to the defense, "Go get it." The defense behind them is as good or better than any defense in the game.

In Colorado, you have to have guys with sinkers. With Cook and Marguis, that's their main pitch. With Jimenez, he's going to have to get to the point where he gets past that sixth inning, past that jam. Unfortunately, he's going up against No. 1s a lot. He's still a young kid. I think Jimenez has probably four of the top pitches in baseball. He throws his fastball 99 mph and his slider 92, and he has a great changeup and a wonderful curveball. Arms like his come around once every 20 years. That being said, he's still learning.

- As told to Matt Crossman



A HISTORY OF SECOND HALF SLIDES

So far this season, Jason Marguis, Ubaldo Jimenez and Aaron Cook have been solid at the top of the Rockies' rotation. But, if their stats from 2006-08 are any indication, they might struggle down the stretch.

MARCH-JULY	AUGUST-SEPTEMBER	
26-20, 5.01 ERA	11-14, 5.48	
29-21, 3.81 ERA	4-10, 5.16 ERA	
8-9, 3.76 ERA	8-7, 4.26 ERA	
	26-20, 5.01 ERA 29-21, 3.81 ERA	

LOS ANGELES DODGERS

With the innings piling up, how big of a concern is the bullpen?

Because Los Angeles didn't add a starting pitcher at the nonwaiver trading deadline, more pressure will fall on a bullpen that—so far—has been one of the best in the N.L.

The Dodgers' bullpen has the majors' third-best ERA and didn't blow a lead after the eighth inning until the end of July. However, it has carried a heavy workload—pitching more innings than any contender'sand All-Star closer Jonathan Broxton has battled a toe injury.

But Broxton says the toe no longer is a concern, and the Dodgers got a boost from a trade for George Sherrill, who closed for the Orioles. "Having an experienced lefthander will help," manager Joe Torre says. "He gives us an experienced backup to our (closer) situation."

– Stan McNeal



SAN DIEGO PADRES

After dealing Jake Peavy, what does the future of the rotation look like?

Because Peavy had been sidelined since June 8 with an ankle injury, the team already had experienced life without its ace. Factor in a shoulder injury to veteran righthander Chris Young and the Padres have used 10 different starting pitchers since Peavy last stood on the mound for them.

A couple of the young starters look promising. Mat Latos, a 21-year-old rookie righthander, went 4-1 with a 2.43 ERA in his first five starts, and 25-year-old righthander Clayton Richard, acquired in the Peavy deal, had a 3.18 ERA in his first two Padres starts. "Richard and Latos are the best of the young group, and Chris



.....

Young will be excellent if he gets back," says Jerry Coleman, a nineseason major league veteran and longtime Padres broadcaster.

- Chris Bahr

Latos is one of the young Padres starting pitchers who give the team hope for the future.

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

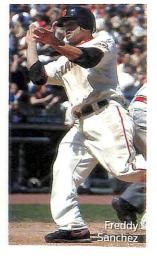
The pitching has been dominant, but has the team done enough to improve the offense?

The Giants' need for a boost on offense was evident in the first 10 games after the All-Star break, when they managed just 2.3 runs per game. So they traded for 1B Ryan Garko, who has good power, and 2B Freddy Sanchez, the 2006 N.L. batting champion.

"The key with the Garko and Sanchez additions is getting better at-bats at important spots in the lineup," says Duane Kuiper, a Giants broadcaster and veteran of 12 major league seasons.

Garko is hitting fifth and Sanchez second, in front of rising star 3B Pablo Sandoval. In the first four games with Garko and Sanchez, San Francisco averaged 7.0 runs—the kind of support the majors' top-ranked pitching staff hadn't enjoyed all season.

- Ryan Fagan





Minor league ballpark

Hammons Field, Springfield, Mo. I played there the first year the park was open. It was nice and new, and Springfield has a lot of stuff for a minor league player to do.

Entry music:

JAMMONS FIELD: JOHN S. STEWART / AP; LOST: COURTESY ABC; ETHIER: HARRY HOW / GETTY IMAGES

Trevor Hoffman's
"Hells Bells." Playing
San Diego so much,
we heard that a lot.
Didn't want to, but
we did.

Play to watch: As an outfielder, I like to see guys thrown out at bases—at either third or home. You need a nice, long throw—maybe a one-hop—and it's usually a bang-bang-type thing.

Memory before the pros: Making the playoffs in high school (St. Mary's Catholic in Phoenix) for the first time. We were a bad team my first couple of years, and finally, my last year, we put it together.

Clubhouse snack:
 Life cereal.

Baseball movie: Brewster's Millions, starring Richard Pryor.



Way to kill time in the clubhouse:
 When we're at home, after batting practice, I sit down and watch an episode of a TV show on my iPhone for

half an hour. It's a way to keep up on

them. Lately, I've been watching Lost.

- Stan McNeal

Scouts' Views: Deadline deals

Two scouts—one from each league—analyze some of the impact moves at the nonwaiver trading deadline:

➤ Does St. Louis have the majors' best middle-of-the-lineup combination with Matt Holliday hitting behind Albert Pujols?

A.L. scout: "Yes. Getting out of Oakland really helped Holliday. It sure looked like he hated it there. Going back to the leg lift on the swing has helped him, too. (Mark) McGwire talked him into giving up that leg lift, and you can see what happened."

N.L. scout: "I used to think it was (Philadelphia's Chase) Utley and (Ryan) Howard, but not now. Holliday and Pujols just do not give away at-bats. I do wonder if Pujols can live with having another big dog in the lineup with him. You can tell Pujols likes being 'the man.'"

After the addition of Cliff Lee, is Philadelphia's rotation too lefthanded?

A.L. scout: "Having four lefthanders doesn't bother me, as long as each of them has a third pitch to use against righthanders. For me,

that's (Jamie) Moyer's big problem. I can't tell the difference between his fastball and his changeup, and that is not a good sign."

with this because there are just enough differences between each guy. The odd thing is the righthander (Joe Blanton) is their best pitcher right now. (Cole) Hamels cannot get it going. I think last year took a lot out of him."

Which prospect dealt at the deadline has the brightest future?

A.L. scout: "Josh Roenicke (traded from Cincinnati to Toronto) has everything you need to be a closer. He's got nasty stuff, and he carries himself like nothing ever bothers him."

N.L. scout: "Everybody says Kyle Drabek is Philadelphia's best prospect, but that's not true. They gave up their best prospect in the trade with Cleveland: (righthander Jason) Knapp."

- Gerry Fraley



Haley's helpers: 5 men who influenced the Chiefs' new coach

It has been a long climb up the football ladder for first-year Chiefs coach Todd Haley, 42, who once was a ballboy for the Steelers. The son of Dick Haley, an NFL cornerback for six seasons and now in his 43rd year as a personnel man, Todd has evolved from scouting assistant to wide receivers coach to offensive coordinator to head coach. He shared his five biggest coaching influences with Sporting News.



1. DICK HALEY

Dolphins player personnel analyst

My father would be No. 1, even though he wasn't a coach. The

longer I've been in the business, the more I truly believe he is one of the great football people. He's been just a tremendous asset to me. To be able to ask questions, talk, learn, sit with during games as I was growing up ...



2. BILL PARCELLS Dolphins executive VP of football operations

Obviously, he gave me a great opportunity. He was somebody who

pushed me hard, taught me every day and stuck with me at various spots. I think we're similar personalities in a lot of ways, so he was an easy guy to watch and learn from. As your boss, and even now as a friend who I can call and ask head coaching questions of, how could you have a better resource?



3. MAURICE CARTHON Chiefs assistant head coach/running backs

As a young coach, Mo was somebody I was instantly drawn

to as far as saying, "That's the way you do it." Every running back group he's ever coached looks the same and is always productive. They have a

soldier-type mentality. He coaches hard. He's not interested in being friends, yet the guys generally end up liking him and respecting him in the end. Mo Carthon is somebody I continue to look up to today, and I'm just so grateful I have him on my staff.



4. DAN HENNING **Dolphins offensive** coordinator

Dan is a brilliant offensive coach, a guy who at 22 was coaching

two positions with the Houston Oilers. He knows every facet of offensive football. In this business, you have some insecurity, you have some egos that prevent some coaches from helping younger guys, but coach Henning was such a secure, confident individual-one of the smartest people I've ever been around as far as giving you advice. Whatever you want to talk aboutfootball, politics, women, whatever-he can converse for an hour on. He gave me a great amount of freedom, but he also gave me a great amount of responsibility at an early point in my career. If I had ideas offensively that I believed in and was willing to prove, he would implement them during games. I sat next to him in the press box for three years, and if I pointed to a play, he would call it.



5. RON ERHARDT

Former Patriots coach

When I was a scout and I was really trying to get on to the coaching side of it, he taught me

a bunch. He spent extra time with me watching tape. He pushed for me to get the quality control job with the Jets. He didn't have to do that, but I'm very grateful he did. He had been with Bill for a long time, and I know he was influential in Parcells' giving me the chance.

- As told to Dennis Dillon



My advice to rookie running backs



By Steve Slaton

Second-year Houston Texans running back, who ran for 1,282 yards as a rookie

Protect your quarterback. To get on the field, you

have to protect the quarterback. You need to know your protections better than your running plays because you want to be out there every down. When guys come after your quarterback, you have to be the guy who gives your quarterback time and helps your linemen out.

Eliminate mistakes, Every rookie is going to make mistakes. But limit them every day and correct them as you make them. Coaches don't want to be telling you the same thing every day.

Get in the film room. Watch who you're playing against and study that opponent so you know them as well as you know your own team.

- As told to Albert Breer

How I spent my offseason



By Joe Flacco Baltimore Ravens quarterback

I hunted pheasants in Minnesota with Todd Bouman, my former teammate who is

now with the Jaguars. I had never hunted anything in my life. That was the first time I had ever shot anything. It was pretty disgusting. Not just shooting it but putting it in my vest after I did. I didn't want anything to do with touching it or cleaning it.

I obviously didn't know what I was doing. A couple of times I put up my gun and pulled the trigger, but I left the safety on. I definitely hit one, though. I may have even hit two, but a bunch of us fired at the same

time so it was hard to tell. I had a vest on, a bright-orange vest, so everybody could see each other. When I shot mine, they knew I was grossed out, so they made me carry it around in my vest. At the end of the day, they made me take a picture while I was holding its neck.

I didn't clean the pheasant or anything, but they cooked it up at night. I ate it, but I didn't even try to taste it. I kind of just chewed it up and swallowed it. I was afraid of the taste. I still have no idea if I like the taste of pheasant or not. Would I go back and do it again? Yeah, if Todd invites me.

- As told to Clifton Brown

Haley's history

Scouting assistant ('95-96), Passing game Offensive Coach offensive assistant/quality receivers coordinator/wide control ('97-98), wide coach receivers coach receivers coach ('99-00) Chicago Bears Dallas Cowboys Arizona Cardinals Kansas City Chiefs N.Y. Jets (1995-2000)

By Clifton Brown

cliftonbrown@sportingnews.com

Iason Campbell is like the prom date who knows he was not the first choice. After flirting unsuccessfully with Jay Cutler and Mark Sanchez during the offseason, the Redskins have given Campbell another year to solidify his position as their franchise quarterback. Campbell, who lost six of his final eight starts last season, will have to improve in a handful of ways to make sure 2009 isn't his last dance with the Redskins.

Take charge. Campbell makes laid-back guys seem hyper. Quarterback is a leadership position, and some added swagger from Campbell could spread confidence to his teammates.

> Tight end Chris Cooley says: "Even when you see him a little bit upset, he's still a pretty cool guy, pretty calm. He doesn't seem to let anything bother him too much. A lot of people make a big deal about quarterback personas. I think he's fine. He's a leader for us, a leader in our huddle. I think Jason Campbell knows what he needs to do, and that persona is just fine. He's a little more assertive now when he's on the field and in the huddle, and I'm OK with that."

Use those legs. The Redskins' 🚄 🛮 offensive line is a major

question, so Campbell must not hesitate to use his mobility. He was sacked 38 times last season, tied with the Rams' Marc Bulger for most in the NFC. Redskins coaches are encouraging Campbell to scramble more in '09, both to escape pressure and to move the chains.

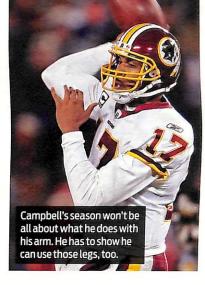
Washington's Campbell has one chance

> Coach Jim Zorn says: "He's much more explosive away from the line of scrimmage. He understands more about the athleticism that it takes to play the quarterback position. And I think he's seeing that he's a pretty good athlete."

Improve the red zone production. The red zone has been a red light for Campbell. He threw just 13 touchdown passes last season, the fewest among the 10 quarterbacks who attempted at least 500 passes. Too often, the Redskins settled for field goals.

> Cooley says: "I think the red zone is a huge emphasis for our whole team. That was a huge negative last year, that ability to score points, and we're really trying to address that."

Build a rapport with the young receivers. If Campbell can establish Devin Thomas and Malcolm Kelly as consistent targets, the Redskins' offense will be much harder



to contain. Thomas and Kelly struggled as rookies, but Thomas worked out with Campbell during the offseason.

➤ Thomas says: "He knows me better, and we've established a chemistry."

Make the most of experience. $\ensuremath{\mathrm{Now}}$ in his second year in Zorn's offense, Campbell is expected to more quickly recognize where he should throw and when he should call an audible. This is the first time since high school Campbell will play in the same system in consecutive seasons.

> Cooley says: "We are so far ahead of where we were last year. It's just a matter of fine-tuning everything."



5 games circled on my schedule

By Antoine Winfield Minnesota Vikings cornerback

> SEPTEMBER 13 AT CLEVELAND

I've never played at Cleveland Stadium. I'm from Akron, Ohio, which is 20 minutes away from Cleveland. Going back home. I'll be excited to play in front of my friends and family. A lot of them haven't been able to make it to my games in Minnesota or Buffalo.

> OCTOBER 5 VS. GREEN BAY

It's a great rivalry, and playing on Monday night is always exciting. It's The Show, and everyone is going to be watching. I love playing against their receivers, Donald Driver and Greg Jennings.

> OCTOBER 25 AT PITTSBURGH

They're the defending Super Bowl champs. It will definitely be a great challenge playing at their house. Steelers coach Mike Tomlin is my former position coach. Really a great guy.

> DECEMBER 20 AT CAROLINA

I'll be facing Steve Smith and Muhsin Muhammad, two good receivers. Definitely another challenge for us.

> DECEMBER 28 AT CHICAGO

Facing the Bears, another divisional opponent, on a Sunday night. They have a new quarterback. It's going to be cold there. It should be a good game.

As told to Dennis Dillon





THE ROTATION



THUNDER SF **KEVIN DURANT**

- O: You're considered a favorite to take one of the spots on Team USA for the World Championship next year and the Olympics in 2012. What do you think? Are you in?
- A: Oh, I am not ready to go that far. I only control what I do, and the decisions are left for someone else. I worked hard (at the team's minicamp). I could have done things a little better. But I gave it the best that I could. We'll see what happens.
- O: The Thunder didn't exactly make any big free-agent moves. Are you OK with that?
- A: I am glad, actually. Maybe down the road we can add a piece or something. But with Russell (Westbrook) and Jeff (Green), plus all the other young guys we have and James Harden our draft pick, I think we just need to go out there and keep getting better as a unit. Then they can add something later if we need it.
- O: Are you thinking playoffs?
- A: Well, you have to think playoffs entering the season. I know the West is tough. But we're going to be better. So, you never know.

- Sean Deveney

5 players primed for a breakout year

By Sean Deveney

sdeveney@sportingnews.com

Sometimes, it's circumstance. Sometimes, it's simply maturation. And sometimes, it's a new twist added to a player's game that changes everything. Whatever the cause, every season there are breakout players-those who manage to go from middling to mint almost overnight. This season will be no different.

- > Andrea Bargnani, C, Raptors. Bargnani benefited from a coaching switch. In his third season, he thrived with coach Jay Triano after wilting under the criticism of Sam Mitchell, who wanted Bargnani-a 7-footer with a great 3-point shot—to play more like a traditional center. "The thing with Andrea-I think you have to let him be who he is," Triano says. "You would like more rebounding, more defense, more of those things. But you have to emphasize the positive, too."
- > Mike Conley, PG, Grizzlies. Conley never found his way during his rookie year and still was struggling in the first half of last season. But then, a blessing: Memphis hired Lionel Hollins as its coach. Hollins committed to Conley as his point guard, and the team traded Kyle Lowry, Conley's competitor for the starting job. After the All-Star break, Conley averaged 14.5 points and 5.6 assists and made 43.5 percent of his 3-pointers. "You could see Mike's confidence grow in the second half last year," teammate O.J. Mayo says. "I think we're all excited to go out and play with him."
- > Amir Johnson, PF, Bucks. Johnson has talent, but getting him to use that talent on the floor was a challenge in

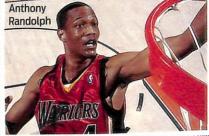
Amir Johnson

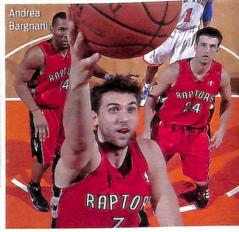


Detroit, especially because the Pistons were trying to contend in the Eastern Conference. Now, heading into his fifth season after being drafted out of high school, Johnson is in Milwaukee with the rebuilding Bucks and tough-minded coach Scott Skiles. Oh, and he will become a free agent next summer. If ever there were a perfect opportunity for Johnson to show he belongs in the NBA, it has arrived. "We think he has a lot of potential," Bucks general manager John Hammond says. "But, to be honest, he needs to show it."

> Anthony Randolph, PF, Warriors. Randolph spent much of his rookie year in coach Don Nelson's doghouse and nailed to the bench. In the first half of the season, he averaged 5.8 points in 12.8







minutes. But after meeting with Nelson and getting a better understanding of what his coach was looking for, Randolph blossomed, averaging 10.7 points and 7.9 rebounds in the second half. He was the star of the NBA's summer league, where he averaged 26.8 points on 60.9 percent shooting, and is primed for a big year. "I have been working out all summer, mostly in Oakland," Randolph says. "I have been trying to stay in touch with Coach Nellie throughout the offseason so that I know what I need to work on. I am looking to get playing time this year."

> John Salmons, G/F, Bulls. Salmons has had a strange NBA career. He struggled with his shot for four years in Philadelphia before blossoming with the Kings. But, because he played in Sacramento, few noticed Salmons had grown into an offensive threat. He averaged 18.3 points after his trade to Chicago last February, though, and with Ben Gordon gone, Salmons should take over the role of go-to scorer in a brighter media market. "He was unbelievable for us last year," teammate Derrick Rose says. "I think, now that he has had time to play with us and after he goes through training camp, he is going to be even better."

What about Mike?

While USA Basketball was holding its showcase scrimmage in Las Vegas last month, one observer was smiling in courtside seats, wearing braids and sunglasses. It was Heat forward Michael Beasley, who endured some ups and downs during his rookie season. Off the court, he was fined for violating league rules at the preseason rookie retreat. On the court, he struggled defensively and had his minutes limited because of it.

USA Basketball snubbed him because of those defensive shortcomings. "Well, there are only so many spots," Team USA chairman Jerry Colangelo says. "So, naturally, there are going to be guys who just don't make it. That doesn't mean that they can't in the future."

Beasley says he has been working out all summer and intends to be more consistent on both ends of the floor next season. "Coach (Erik Spoelstra) demands a lot of me, and I understand that," he says. "I was a rookie, so I think I had a lot to learn. I will get better next year."

Sean Deveney

OLLEGE BASKETBALL

Three teams that will be better than you think

When last season began, Villanova was picked to finish seventh in the Big East-and the Wildcats wound up in the Final Four. So surely there's a team that can surprise us like that in 2009-10.

And maybe more than one:



Opponents will have an even tougher time getting around Varnado and his Mississippi State teammates this season.

> Mississippi State. If the Bulldogs get 7-1 center recruit John Riek healthy and 6-10 power forward recruit Renardo Sidney eligible and buff, they could have the most dangerous frontcourt out there.

"It's going to be fun," says forward Jarvis Varnado, Division I's reigning shot-block king. "John Riek is going to be real good for us. He's so long and can run the floor and rebound. Renardo is a good scorer. We've just got to slim him down, get him in shape, and we'll be ready to go."

- Michigan. If there were some frontcourt power, it'd be easier to suggest greatness for the Wolverines. But when has a John Beilein team needed size? His teams advance in March because they execute and score. Manny Harris and DeShawn Sims have the ability and experience to carry a team.
- > West Virginia. If his teammates are comfortable with sophomore forward Devin Ebanks as the primary option, this could be a sensational offensive team. With Bob Huggins on the bench, you know the Mountaineers will defend.

- Mike DeCourcy

This Curry prefers a big pond

By Mike DeCourcy

decourcy@sportingnews.com

Seth Curry is transferring to play basketball at Duke because he had grown tired of getting so much attention. Isn't that just a little bit hilarious?

Nearly every Duke game is on national TV. Even the gimmes. The coach is an American icon. The nation's largest sports media group gives the Blue Devils so much exposure some have called it DSPN.

Curry is not talking about that kind of attention, though. As the son of former NBA sharpshooter Dell Curry and the brother of lottery pick Stephen Curry, media and fan interest are inevitableeven for a freshman at low-major Liberty. Seth is just looking forward to playing with teammates who'll draw away some defenders.

"The defenses were loading up so much on me there was only so much I could do," Curry says. "During the year, there were times I felt like I wasn't getting better. My dad was kind of seeing the same things I was seeing. Liberty just wasn't the right place for me to continue my career."

Although Duke hadn't recruited him out of high school, the Blue Devils moved fairly quickly to lock up Curry after he announced his decision to transfer in late March.

Why? Coach Mike Krzyzewski was scouting for a February ACC game against Virginia when he punched the play button on a

recording of UVa's loss to Liberty. Curry scorched the Cavaliers for 26 points on the road-in his third college game. It didn't take a coaching genius to identify his potential.

But Krzyzewski is one. So maybe he recognized it faster than a layman might. "I'm sure he can play at our level," Coach K says.

Krzyzewski had accepted only two transfers previously: forwards Roshown McLeod (from St. John's) and Dahntay Jones (from Rutgers). Both went on from Duke to the NBA.

"This kid's got a chance," Krzyzewski says. "I think the year out probably will help him physically."

Mentally? That's another matter. Curry chose Liberty because he wanted to play immediately. Now he'll have to sit a year, per NCAA transfer rules. "It's definitely going to be tough," he says.

Virginia Tech, Dell's school, was the only big-time program that pursued Curry in high school, but the Hokies talked of redshirting him. Davidson coach Bob McKillop wanted him to play alongside Stephen but explained he could not be sure what Seth's role would be as a freshman.

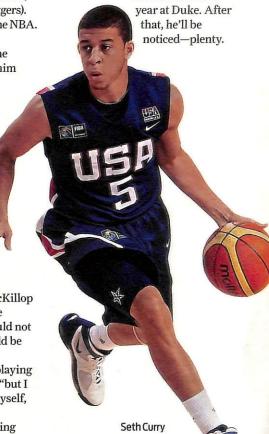
"I wouldn't have minded playing with my brother," Seth says, "but I kind of wanted to separate myself, make my own name."

It worked-sort of. Averaging

20.2 points, he outscored every freshman in Division I. But being a Curry meant attracting attention from opponents based nearly as much on Dell's and Stephen's reputations. Defenses surrounded Seth like he was a fourth Jonas Brother. He wound up making a very un-Curryish 34.7 percent of his 3-pointers, down from 44.0 percent in the season's first two months.

"Before the conference season, against some pretty big teams, I was playing well, shooting it well," he says. "The rest of the time, I had so much of the scoring load on me-I don't want to say I hit a freshman wall, but I was getting kind of tired carrying such a load."

He can hide for a



Butler's Hayward got big in a hurry: 'I JUST SHOT UP'



Butler's Gordon Hayward, a 6-8 forward who averaged 13.1 points last season as a freshman, stood out as the best player who tried out for the United States U-19 national team. How could that be, given the abundance of players from big-time conferences? Hayward told SN how he flew under the radar:

I think the fact I played tennis a lot in high school made a difference. My senior year, I didn't play AAU basketball because I'd already committed to Butler, and I wanted to focus on playing tennis. I wanted to go for a good run in the state tournament. So that might have been the issue.

I went 26-3, then lost in the final eight to the kid who ended up getting second. I won the first set, lost the next two. A heartbreaker. I haven't played tennis since. I haven't picked up a racket. I was glad to focus on one sport, just focus on basketball.

Another issue is I was about 5-11, 125 pounds as a freshman. So I was real little and skinny, and then I just shot up. I don't know how to explain what that was like. One day you're walking through the hallways at eye level with everyone, and a year goes by and you're a whole head taller than everyone. You can see all the way down the hallway. It was a weird experience.

- Mike DeCourcy



NASCAR

Three-wide

Three Sprint Cup drivers—AJ Allmendinger, Jamie McMurray and Marcos Ambroseanswer three questions







Allmendinger

Jamie McMurray

Marcos **Ambrose**

SN: Do you pay attention to loop data statistics?

ALLMENDINGER: Not really. As a driver, all that matters is wins and points. All the other stats don't mean as much to a driver. I think it's cool that NASCAR does those kinds of things for fans and media.

McMURRAY: No. Not at all. AMBROSE: Only if I do well. I'll have a look at how my score was.

SN: What's the biggest lie your spotter ever told you?

ALLMENDINGER: That I am faster than the leader. You hear that and radio back, "Why's he pulling away from us?"

McMURRAY: I don't know if I ever really felt like I was being lied to. I don't think so.

AMBROSE: They tell me every week that I'm the same speed as the leader, yet I'm in 20th place and the guy's pulling away from me. I can't quite work that out.

SN: What do you remember about your first wreck in a racecar?

ALLMENDINGER: That these cars are big and heavy, and I didn't think I was ever going to stop spinning.

McMURRAY: I remember thinking it didn't hurt as bad as I thought it was going to. Racing in late models, I never really had a big wreck, and you're only going 120 miles per hour. Then all of a sudden you go to these tracks and you're running 200 miles per hour, and I think there's always that wonder in your head of How bad is that going to be?

AMBROSE: I've had plenty, so they do blur after a while. My first crash in a stock car was one of the most memorable. (Mike) Skinner was running in front there at Gateway, lost a right front tire, hit the wall, bounced back, took me out. I hit the outside concrete wall driver-side. It was (one of) my first NASCAR races, and I was like, What have I got myself into? - Reid Spencer

'I knew it was going to take time'

Juan Pablo Montoya's foray into Sprint Cup racing started as a joke between Montoya and team owner Chip Ganassi and evolved into a full-time commitment in 2007. By then. Montova already had won the Indianapolis 500 (in 2000) and seven Formula One races. Before the 2009 season, Ganassi partnered with Dale Earnhardt Inc., switched from Dodge to Chevrolet and abandoned his engine shop in favor of Earnhardt Childress Racing engines-and he's having his best season yet. Montoya is eighth in points and appears headed for a spot in the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup. He talked to Sporting News about the progress he has made since his debut.

You have to earn the respect. People knew where I came from, especially drivers and team owners. People in the garage know what I've done before and what I accomplished. I think people in the stands don't have a clue. Some do, but I think the general public has no idea what a Formula One car is.

I was mentally prepared (to struggle at first). I knew what it took and what we had and what we didn't and where the team was, and



I knew it was going to take time.

We've shown everybody that we have the speed to make the Chase.

But, at the same time, you could blow a motor or get involved in a wreck and miss it. Like Kyle (Busch) right now. I'm sure he's going to have a couple of good races and get himself back in, but with fewer races, the task gets bigger. For us, it's just about doing what we've been doing all year. I don't like being too optimistic about it. I'd rather just take it as it comes and work hard at it.

-As told to Reid Spencer

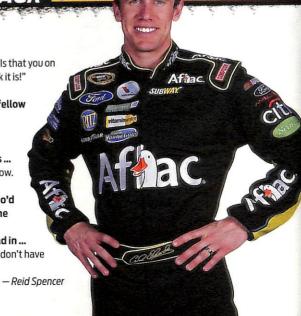
The improvement this year is a combination of great teamwork and great effort from everybody behind the scenes. I think the team's very motivated to run hard and run well. I think my experience counts as well as how the team works and how everybody works together. There's not a single factor in it.

... with Carl Edwards

- > My first car was ... A Ford Ranger.
- > My dream car is ... A '64 Lincoln Continental.
- > The best cruising music is ... Probably Bob Marley.
- When I get a flat ... I curse.
- > A car is incomplete without ... A spare
- > I change my oil every ... Not very often anymore. I used to do it all the time myself.
- I got my last speeding ticket for going ... This is no joke. I got it in front of Gateway International Raceway in sight of the sign of me in victory lane. The cop and I got a really big kick out of it, but he'd already written the ticket. It was like six months ago. I've got a witness. My buddy was sitting

there in the car, and he said, "Is that you on that billboard?" I said, "I think it is!"

- > Hybrids are ... Fun.
- > My No. 1 pet peeve with fellow motorists is ... Not paying attention.
- On a scale of 1 to 10, my highway road rage rating is ... It used to be an 11. I'm good now. I'd say I'm about a 2.
- > The Sprint Cup driver who'd be the most maniacal on the road is ... Boris Said.
- > I wouldn't be caught dead in ... I'll drive anything. Anything I don't have to push is fine.





VICTORY SHARED

TOYOTARACING.COM



MIKE SKINNER 4/27 Kansas



KYLE BUSCH

4/4 Texas

5/1 Richmond

JOEY LOGANO

4/11 Nashville



KYLE BUSCH

5/2 Richmond

DAVID REUTIMANN

5/25 Charlotte





VERIZON WIRELESS presents VIY FIRST RAC

Sports stars share the thrills and excitement from their first time at the track

"Now you see now you don't" John Danks Chicago White Sox Pitcher

When Was Your First Race? I couldn't have been much older than 13.

Where Did You Attend Your First Race? Atlanta

Who Took You To Your First Race? My dad

My First Race Was... A blast! We attended the ARCA race on Friday and then got to see my favorite driver win the Cup race.

The Fans At The Track Were... Awesome—the most genuine and passionate people I've ever been around.

What's In My Garage? 2002 Dodge Ram and 2008 BMW 550i

What Is The Fastest You've Ever Driven In A Street Car? Between 130 and 140 mph.

if You Could Have One Job On The Pit Grew What Would Be? I'd be best at being in charge of giving the driver his water and Powerade.

What Would Your Racing Number Be? 50, the number I wear for Chicago.

What Would Your Racing Nickname Be? The Magic Man ... "Now you see me, now you don't."

Who Has The Hardest Job On Pit Road? Tire man

The Racetrack I Hope To Visit One Day... Bristol night race or Daytona

What Is Your Favorite Winner's Gircle Tradition? The backflip off the car.

What Is Your Favorite Food At The Track? We bring a grill so burgers are eaten at every meal.

hat Do You Enjoy Most About Being At The Track? Hanging with all the other race fans.

ng Hero? My dad and my two best friends I go to the races with.



Verizon Championship Racing officially started its engines in 2009. Follow the #12 Verizon Wireless Dodge Charger and driver Justin Allgaier on the track and on your mobile phone with race highlights, expert analysis and more on V CAST. All on America's Largest 3G Network, Verizon Wireless.



Subject to Cust. Agmit & Calling Plan. V CAST phone & add'l charges req'd for V CAST service. Offers & coverage, varying by service, not avail



Racing fans, allow us to start your engines.



Racing fans aren't like other fans. Get the inside track from Verizon Championship Racing on V CAST. With race highlights, analysis, and exclusive behind-the-scenes interviews from the best drivers and crews in racing. All on America's Largest 3G Network, Verizon Wireless.



verizonchampionshipracing.com



Down the stretch they come ...

By Reid Spencer

rspencer@sportingnews.com

There are four races to go before the field for the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup is set at Richmond, and those events take place at venues with markedly different characteristics. From sweeping Michigan to concrete Bristol to high-speed Atlanta to action-packed Richmond, Sporting News takes a look at the four remaining racetracks.

MICHIGAN, AUGUST 16

> Tale of the track: Wide, highspeed 2-mile track with multiple racing grooves. ... Invariably produces fuel-mileage races.... Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s last Cup win came in last year's June race.



Carl Edwards says: "The good thing about going to a track like Michigan is that there are so many different lines. Some guys run

in the middle of the track. You can run high or low. I've had a lot of success there. (The race) will be the five-year anniversary of my first Cup start."

BRISTOL, AUGUST 22

> Tale of the track: The world's fastest half-mile racetrack. ... Track resurfacing and graduated banking have opened a second groove. ... There is little or no time to react to trouble. ... Roush Fenway Racing drivers Matt



Kenseth and Edwards have won the past four August races there.



Greg Biffle says: "Bristol's not easy, for sure. It never has been. But Bristol seems to be easier now than it was

before. Now the corners are a little smoother, a little more laid out, and cars can run side by side a little bit better-but it's still a challenging place."

ATLANTA. SEPTEMBER 6

> Tale of the track: First Sunday night race on Labor Day weekend. ... With California taking its place, no longer a Chase track. ... At 1.5 miles, one of NASCAR's fastest racetracks. ... Tony Stewart and Jimmie Johnson are strong there.



Jimmie Johnson says: "I think that the change with Atlanta and California is good for the No. 48 car. We have been able to win

that fall California race a couple

times the last few years. Atlanta, granted, we finished second there last year, but we ran around in like 11th or 12th most of the day, and (crew chief) Chad (Knaus) made a brave call to come in and get tires, and we worked our way back up into second."

RICHMOND, SEPTEMBER 12

> Tale of the track: Last chance for "bubble" drivers to race their way into the Chase. ... Home track for Denny Hamlin, who has dominated there but never won. ... Three of Earnhardt Jr.'s 18 Cup wins have come at Richmond, a three-quartermile track. ... Johnson has won three of the five races there since the introduction of the new car.



Denny Hamlin says: "We've been so close there that we'd appreciate (winning) there a lot more, I'm sure. That place is

kind of like Martinsville was for me, until I won there. If you actually lose a few, you definitely appreciate the win more."



Q: How has your communication with Dale Earnhardt Jr. evolved over the past two months?

A: When you haven't worked with somebody before, there's a communication gap. I don't understand when he says the car is tight how much of an adjustment to make or when he says the car is loose how much of an adjustment to make. So there's an amount of time that has to go by there.

Q: What has been your main focus in learning what he needs in the car?

A: Idon't really think it's been one thing. We've really worked on the cars. We've worked on the communication, not only between Junior and myself but among the engineers and him. I definitely feel like we've seen a lot of improvement over the first quarter of the season compared to the last eight races.

O: Does it concern you that the finishes haven't reflected the progress you've seen so far?

A: I'm definitely disappointed ... because this is a bottom-line sport, and on Monday morning when the paper hits and everybody sees that we finished 12th or 14th or 16th or 35th, that's all they understand. They don't understand that we ran 10th all day and had a problem at the end or ran top six all day, like (at Indianapolis) and had a motor problem unfortunately. It's bittersweet. I'm happy to see progression, and I think everybody on the team is excited about how we've been running. Obviously, we're not where we want to be yet, but we're making steps that way.

- Reid Spencer

In NASCAR, age is nothing but a number

With his victory in the Camping World Truck Series race at Nashville, Ron Hornaday became the first driver to win five straight races in the series-at age 51. In fact, Hornaday is the first driver to win five straight in any of NASCAR's top three series since 1971. Hornaday and 50-year-old Mark Martin, a four-time winner in the Sprint Cup Series this season, are proof that age doesn't have to be a barrier to success. Hornaday answers the age-old question for SN: How do you guys do it?

➤ I feel like a 19- or 20-year-old again. Mark Martin-gosh, you can't say

enough about him. His races are a lot longer, and he's working out. You can see how focused he is.

I think Mark and myself and some of these guys-we don't know anything else but racing, and we're just putting 100 percent into it.

Mark Martin's a true racer since he's been a kid, and with the confidence he's had through the years, it's all a 'jell' factor-if you get with the right people that really believe in you. Myself and Mark, we've got guys who believe in us, and we give them pretty good feedback.

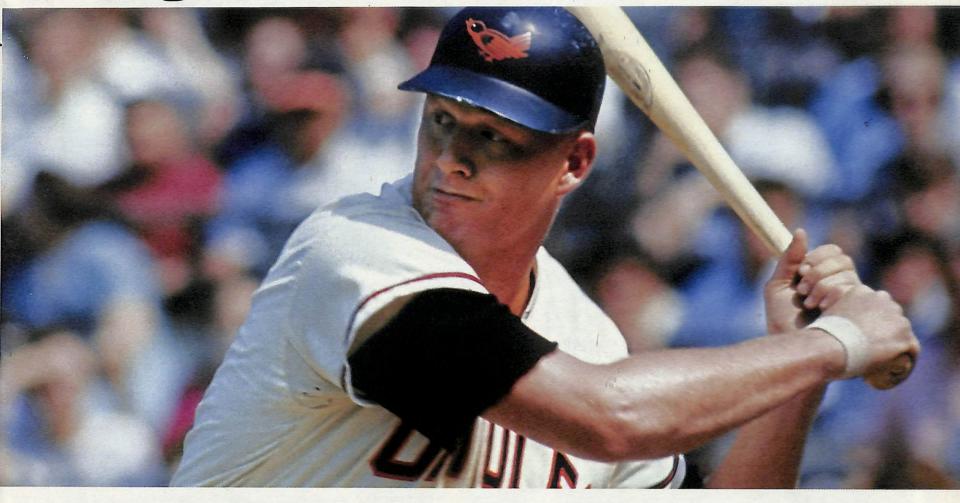
As told to Reid Spencer

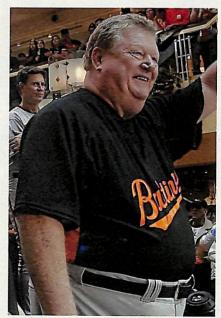


Hornaday

I Remember ...

Boog Powell Four-time All-Star, 1970 A.L. MVP





POWELL: ROB CARR / AP; POWELL (1960): FOCUS ON SPORT / GETTY IMAGES

obody hit bombs like Boog. In 17 big league seasons, 14 c. them in Baltimore, Boog Powell hit 339 home runs, many of them monstrous blasts. He was the A.L. MVP in 1970 and played in four World Series, winning two. These days, he runs a barbecue stand at Camden Yards-smack where a blast or 20 of his would've landed had he ever played there. He recounted (perhaps) the longest home run of his career, which came at old Comiskey Park on July 18, 1966, for Sporting News.

At the end of his career, the Orioles traded Powell. and he hit his last home runs in a Cleveland uniform. But now, nearly 35 years later, Boog, who is No. 3 on the O's all-time home runs list, is back in Baltimore.

I hit one in Chicago off of Juan Pizarro that went out of the stadium in right-center. I think it was 415 where it went out, and it was 118 feet high when it went out. It just disappeared into the night out there. It was pretty cool.

He hung me a slider out over the plate. Everything was perfect. Timing was perfect. I didn't think I swung overly hard at it; I just had a nice good swing. Everything just happened. All of a sudden, nobody moved in the upper deck. They announced that it did go out in the parking lot somewhere.

They didn't announce the distances back in those days. It went at least another 100 feet after the wall, maybe quite a bit more. I think that's the farthest one I hit. I hit balls harder that stayed

in ballparks because they hit stuff. It's hard to gauge exactly how far a ball went.

Brooksie (Brooks Robinson) asked me, "Did you get it all, Big Boy?" He asked me that every time.

I said, "Naw, man, I got it right on the end of the bat."

"You lying son of a ... "

I always did that. But I was laughing when I said it. Those kind of shots, you just shake your own head. That was pretty cool right there. There was a marker up there on the roof for many years.

There was a rumor that the White Sox kept their baseballs in a freezer, and we were playing with frozen baseballs all the time. That one thawed out pretty quick.

- As told to Matt Crossman

The Vick controversy is as much about class as race

t started the moment Michael Vick was released from legal custody. Now that he had paid his debt to society, the question loomed: Does he still owe a debt to the NFL?

Vick bashers were adamant that he should-at the very least-be suspended because he had yet to be punished for lying to commissioner Roger Goodell two years ago about his involvement with dogfighting.

Vick supporters went 180 degrees the other way: He has been to jail, and that's enough. Any further punishment would be piling on. Let the man move on with his life.

What was most predictable about the debate wasn't that it existed but the racial nature of it. Many of the Vick bashers were white, the supporters black. Even in 2009, with a black man in the White House, an argument about how to treat a black athlete broke down almost squarely along racial lines.

Or so it seemed.

"It may look like this is about race, but in many ways it's more about class than race," Juan Williams said

soon after Goodell announced Vick wouldn't be allowed to play before Week 6 of the regular season. "If you go back to the case itself, (Vick lawyer) Billy Martin was trying to create a divide between lower-class blacks, who were picketing on Vick's behalf, and middle- to upper-class whitescall it the PETA crowd if you will-who were picketing against him."

Williams has a good deal of experience in this area. He has written eloquently on the subject of race for The Washington Post for more than 30 years and is currently a commentator on both National Public Radio and FOX News.

He has heard this argument many times in the past. "If you go back to the O.J. (Simpson) case, that broke down along racial lines, too," he said. "But it was different. O.J. Simpson wasn't a hero in the black community by any stretch, but a lot of people saw the white cops as being guilty of lying and trying to frame him.

"Many, if not most of them, had had experience at some point with white cops who were unfair to black people. They weren't happy with the verdict

By John Feinstein

because they thought O.J. was innocent but because they thought the white cops were guilty."

In the Vick case, there isn't any doubt about guilt. Williams sees the response to Goodell's suspension on two levels: Not everyone in the black community views dogfighting as a heinous crime, while others who do see it that way look at Vick not as one person but as a symbol.

"He's not a symbol of oppression or anything like that," Williams said. "This is where class comes into play. If you look at our jails, something like 60 percent of the population is African American or Latino, while less than a third of our total population is African American and Latino. There are a lot of young black men in trouble these days. Sports is still a way out. A lot of people look at someone like Vick and say, 'This is all he has in the world-the ability to play ball.'

"You take that away from him and maybe he ends up back in serious trouble. Their attitude is they want to see him-like anyone in his situationhave a chance to remake their lives. It isn't so much, 'He's suffered enough' ... as, 'Let's try to keep him from getting in trouble again.'

"The other part of it is cultural. In a lot of urban areas, young black men don't see dogfighting as a bad thing. I know that's true of lower-class whites in rural areas, too. A lot of poor blacks see dogfighting as a way of proving, 'I'm a man. I'm tougher than you.' Or, 'My dog can kill your dog.' They somehow see it as making you authentically black. That is a huge distortion of authentic blackness on a tragic level."

Tragic or not, Williams knows there are those who see the Vick episode as another example of whiterun America failing to understand



Acclaimed author John Feinstein is a regular contributor to Sporting News. Feinstein's 24th book-Are You Kidding Me? The Story of Rocco Mediate's Extraordinary Battle with Tiger Woods at the U.S. Open-is now available at bookstores and Amazon.com.

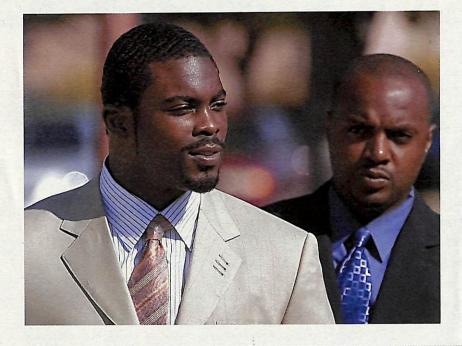
what it means to be a black man. "A majority of the players in the NFL are African Americans," he said. "The owners are white, the commissioner is white. They're the rules-makers, no matter how much money the players might be making. ... When you are part of a minority that has been oppressed, that's been subjected to segregation and being disenfranchised, when there's a chance to raise your hand in defense of someone in that group, you do it."

In a sense, it would seem Goodell found the right compromise. He didn't let Vick off without punishment, but he did give him a chance to remake his life as a football player at 29. But still, the bigger issue persists.

"The toughest thing about this for everybody is the class part," Williams said. "We have made progress in race relations, but class wars have existed forever and no one's really found a way to bridge that gap. Is there a racial element to this? Of course. But, sadly for everyone, it's not just that. It's not nearly that simple or that easy to label. It goes beyond that."

Of course, there is one way to bridge the class gap-by winning. When Vick gets back on the field, most of those watching him from the stands will be people with money. And, if he makes plays and wins games for their team, they'll stand and cheer for him.

Success on the field is the one place guaranteed to erase all divides-racial, class or any others that might exist.



When Vick got out of jail, the debate was on: Should the NFL extend his punishment?

NEW EDGE INFUSED.



GET YOUR EDGE.

NEW EDGE INFUSED SHAVE GEL'S LOTIONIZED FORMULA, WITH VITAMINS AND ANTIOXIDANTS, WILL GIVE YOUR SKIN A NOTICEABLY SMOOTH AND HEALTHY LOOK.

EDGESHAVE.COM

